



## How do I set up a field lab?

### 1. Bring together a group of interested farmers and stakeholders around an idea

From an existing discussion group, project or network, a group of farmers or growers come together around an idea. Individuals are welcome to submit ideas. We can help to partner them with other farmers and stakeholders interested in the same idea.

If you are working with a farmer group, you can kick off the process by completing the [Expression of Interest form on our website](#).

Alternatively, if an individual farmer or grower submits an idea, we will share it with our networks to find out if there is interest from other farmers in exploring the same topic. Dependent on interest, we may contact our bank of coordinators to identify a suitable coordinator.

### 2. Run an introductory meeting

This could be run online or in-person. The main purpose is to:

- Bring all the potential field lab group members together
- Introduce Innovative Farmers and the field lab concept
- Discuss the areas of common interest from your group's businesses
- Discuss what topic the group would like to base their field lab on and if possible agree on the research question they would like to answer
- Agree if they want to develop a field lab and arrange the next time to meet

### 3. Update the Innovative Farmers team

Tell us about your idea for a field lab – what do you want to explore? Why is it a concern for you and/or the group?

- Have you started to consider ways in which you might approach a trial?
- Who else is interested in being involved? Do you have a researcher in mind, is there a suitable sponsor that might want to support the trial? Do you want to extend the field lab to a larger group of farmers?

This will help you to agree with the Innovative Farmers team how the field lab will be supported, funded, co-ordinated and its potential start date and duration.

## **4. Matchmaking your group with a researcher**

If the group does not already have someone in mind, Innovative Farmers can match your group with a researcher based on the chosen topic. We aim to offer a choice of researcher.

Each field lab receives minimum 24 hours researcher time. This could include meetings, desk study, support with trial design, developing data collection protocols, data analysis and report writing.

## **5. Meeting to co-design the field lab**

This meeting can be held anywhere but often a participating farmer offers their farm for the meetup, particularly if they have an example of the groups chosen topics of interest.

Ask the researcher to come prepared with a summary of research evidence on the topic to share with the group members.

Encourage farmers to share their experience and knowledge of the problem to inform the researcher and each other.

Discuss their research priorities and agree on a simple research question and trial design. Trial design will likely vary a little from farm to farm, but try to all agree on a core research question to be explored across all sites.

Tools and tips for facilitating this process can be found in the coordinator resources section on our website.

At this meeting and in follow up communication, agree which group members are prepared to carry out trials on their farms as this may influence trial design and funding requirements.

## **6. Submit a field lab proposal and funding request**

Prepare and share the proposal forms with the group for comment. All group members must agree with the level of commitment that the trial method requires. If anyone expresses concern that it is too intensive or impractical, the co-ordinator needs to ensure that these concerns are discussed openly with the group to identify an alternative achievable for all the triallists.

Funding applications are reviewed by members of the Innovative Farmers steering group which includes academics and industry stakeholders.

As many group members as possible are encouraged to take part in trials to produce valuable evidence across different sites and provide a dynamic group learning environment with better confidence in the results.

*NB: Depending on the complexity of the field lab design and potential for amends as part of the reviewing process, it can take between three to four weeks for a funding decision on the Research Fund grant award.*

## 7. Commence and progress the field lab

- Provide Innovative Farmers with details of the participating farmers
- We will arrange a communications planning meeting with you, to understand the key moments in the field lab for media coverage and ideas for useful material, e.g. guides on the practices or assessments, conference sessions, and networks that would benefit from the results of the field lab.
- Consider setting up a WhatsApp group – these can work well to share updates, photos and send reminders for the group
- Organise group meetings online or at triallists' farms at important stages in the trial. Consider the best time for meetings – early morning, lunchtime or early evening work well, but this will depend on farming commitments, e.g. milking times at dairy farms. It is useful at those meetings to all agree on a date and time for the next meeting
- Frequent communication with the triallists and researcher (particularly the odd phone call) is important to keep the field lab on track
- At least one open-farm walk should be organised during or at the end of the trials. Additional webinars and online workshops are encouraged. We can support the organisation and running of these events, and have a separate events budget for this – please contact us in advance to discuss.



*Farmers scoring wheat varieties in organic wheat varieties field lab event*

## 9. Produce a final report and run a closing meeting

Support the researcher to prepare a final report – we have a template for this. The results in the final report should be summarised in ways that are easy to follow for all readers both inside and outside of the group.

Share this with the group and arrange a meeting to discuss the results, their experiences, observations and what they will do next. Make sure you record the farmers' experiences and learning.

## 10. Next steps

Topics explored in field labs are often not solved with one field lab. Triallists might continue to tweak and improve the practices or the group may have ideas for future research. It may be appropriate to apply for another grant from Innovative Farmers, but do also approach us to consider a joint application for larger funding streams.



*Group meeting for the IKnowFood field lab*

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## Contact us



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