

How to Establish A Focus Farm



A Hand-Book

How to Establish A Focus Farm

The IndoDairy project, a collaborative research project between the Government of Indonesia, the University of Adelaide, and the Australian government-funded by ACIAR (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research), established Focus Farms as part of its research activities. This handbook outlines the stages of establishing a Focus Farm based on the approach used in the IndoDairy project in Tajurhalang Village, Cijeruk District, Bogor Regency, West Java in 2019.

1. What is a Focus Farm?

It has been shown in Australia that extension methods such as farmer Discussion Groups and Focus Farms (as opposed to demonstration farms) have been effective methods for providing farmers with new information, knowledge, and skills. Much of this is gained through farmer-to-farmer learning supported by service providers.

A Focus Farm is an extension approach that allows for other farmers and service providers to learn through the “story” of the Focus Farm, as it is a real-life application of new practices with all the challenges a business faces.

Focus Farms provides the opportunity for participating farmers to learn from the activities of the Focus Farmer based on their individual farmer's goals and objectives. This is supported by:

- Financial and biophysical indicators of the farm and comparing these to current industry standards and best practice.
- Applying good business management principles to decision making.
- Allowing the opportunity for discussion and analysis of the risks.
- Drawing on the collective experience of the support group.
- Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the decisions that are made.
- Communicate the decisions made to support a wider audience of farmers (e.g. newsletters) and other activities such as farmers visiting the Focus Farm, or the Focus Farmer speaking at meetings.

2. What are the criteria for selecting a suitable Focus Farmer?

- An innovator who has the ambition to try and change things to improve productivity and profitability on the farm.
- Keeping the commitment of being a Focus Farm who will share any information regarding farm management during the process of learning.



3. How do the service providers (extension agents) select a suitable farmer to become a Focus Farmer?

After understanding the selection criteria, farmers in the chosen region are approached by the service provider to gauge their level of interest in becoming a Focus Farm. A list of interested farmers is compiled.

After obtaining several names, four steps are followed to select a suitable Focus Farmer. These include:

4 Stages of Selecting A Focus Farm

1

Interview with candidates

2

Verification

3

Assessment

4

Confirmation

Stage 1: Interview with candidates

Interview questions are used to assess farmers against the selection criteria to ensure the most suitable farmer is chosen and to provide a clear understanding of the objectives of a Focus Farm.

The list of questions asked during interviews with farmers:

Criteria	Ranking 1- 5 and comments
1. What are the farm's business goals/aspirations? <i>E.g. Increasing milk production/per cow, expanding farm size/number of cows, improving fodder production, increase profit per litre.</i>	
2. Would you be willing to share information about your farm with other farmers and group advisors i.e. Cost of production and farm records?	
3. Would you be willing to take on suggested advice and willing to try new techniques and practices to improve your farm?	
4. Would you be willing to have information about your farm communicated in a newsletter and more widely (e.g. a project website)?	
5. Are you willing to commit to having regular Focus Farm meetings over 12 months? This includes hosting open days with more farmers and advisers invited.	
6. Is your family supportive of this activity? Would your spouse also be involved? How many family members are involved with the farm?	
7. Are you comfortable with farmers and advisers visiting your farm regularly? E.g. once a month	

Criteria	Ranking 1- 5 and comments
8. Are you willing to assist and share information with the extension agent who will make regular visits to collect data on your farm?	
9. What are your short-term plans for the farm over the next year?	
10. What are your medium-term plans for the farm over the next 5 years?	
11. Are there any particular farmers or service providers you'd like to invite to Focus Farm meetings?	
12. What are the keys 3 challenges you'd like to improve on your farm?	

Considerations for the interview are:

- Ensure the candidate is completely confident and committed to becoming a Focus Farmer.
- Schedule the interview, but be flexible and willing to adjust the time. Interviews should not be conducted during busy hours when farmers are working on the farm, so choosing time wisely.
- Service providers (extension agents) ensure that they have prepared a form of questions that must be answered by the Focus Farm candidates.
- Allocate enough time to the interview. Do not rush the farmer – allow them to fully respond to fully convey their answers.
- After the interview process is completed, the service providers (extension agents) should inform the candidate there will be a return visit if any responses need clarification.

Stage 2: Verification

At this stage, the project team verifies the answers from the Focus Farm candidates by visiting the farm and checking the cattle conditions, and to reconfirm the farmer's commitment to the project activities. The verification process is carried out by the service provider (or project team) with the farmer and his family.

Stage 3: Assessment

The assessment compares the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates against the selection criteria and questions. This comparison and subsequent ranking are used to select the strongest 1 (one) candidate as a Focus Farmer. This assessment considers all aspects based on the Focus Farm criteria, the answers provided in the interview form, and the results from verification through visits.



Stage 4: Confirmation

Using the assessment, the candidate with the highest score is contacted to confirm the farmer's commitment and willingness to participate in Focus Farm activities. The successful farmer will then work with the project team to prepare for the first planning meeting.

What is needed to plan for the first meeting?

Selection of Advisory Group and Supporting Farmers

- **Support Farmer Group**
During the initial meeting with the chosen Focus Farmers. Farmers will select approximately 5-7 Support Farmers to be involved with the regular farm meetings to support the discussion and learning during the process.
- **Advisory Group**
Besides, the Project Team recommends experts to join the Focus Farm Advisory Group. They are selected based on their expertise that aligns with the goals of the farmer to support the implementation of technology interventions that will be carried out by Focus Farm. The experts in the Advisory Group attend every meeting to contribute their knowledge and advice related to the Focus Farm activities, as well as supporting participating farmers and fellow advisory teams. The total number involved in a Focus Farm should be no more than 15 people (farmers and advisors) for effective discussion and learning.

The Focus Farm holds regular meetings (approximately monthly) at the farm, focusing on the goals and activities of the Focus Farmer with regular input from the advisory group. An Open Day event is held at the end of the activity to share learnings with other farmers in the region.

The expectation is that sharing real-life experiences while working at Focus Farm can be an inspiration and motivation for other farmers who want to learn directly from a Focus Farmer (farmer-to-farmer learning).

Overview of Focus Farm Meetings

1. Planning meeting, objectives:

- this initial meeting is to share the goals of the Focus Farm, including short-term goals (1-3 years ahead) and long-term goals (> 10 years ahead).
- to plan any interventions that will be carried out to achieve short-term goals.
- to plan an agreed schedule of meetings of approximately once a month, depending on the funding availability (funders/sponsors).

2. Monthly meeting, objectives:

- to update the advisory group on the condition of the farm, cattle, and the business (what happened during the last month, what problems occurred, conveyed by Focus Farmer).
- to report the results of activities that have been carried out in one month with field facilitators/extension agents.

3. Final meeting/review session and evaluation, the objectives:

- to summarize and evaluate activities that have been implemented and what changes have been seen.
- to explore the response or influence on the knowledge of individuals who are involved in Focus Farm activities. Technical facilitation can be done using a dartboard evaluation.

4. Open Day, objectives:

- to share experiences and lessons learned with other farmers regarding the activities carried out on the Focus Farm.
- to facilitate the meeting between Focus farmers and other farmers as a means of obtaining input related to their livestock business.
- to increase motivation and farmer relations (farmer-to-farmer learning).

Special note

During the monthly meeting of Focus Farm IndoDairy, the following activities are carried out:

- Update farm information (condition of lactating cows, dry cows, calves, calves, feed, drums, health, and disease).
- Sampling and analysis (soil, compost, forage, concentrate, and silage).
- Fertiliser plan for the forage plantation (Compost and NPK),
- Planting and harvesting superior forage (Biograss grass, elephant grass, odot, Clitoria legume).
- Making silage from Biograss grass and odot grass.
- Trial supplementary feeding of soybean meal and molasses
- Conduct business/financial analysis.

VLR IndoDairy (extension agent) continues to monitor progress after the review session. This is an effort to maintain the motivation of Focus Farmer and Support Farmers to continue applying technology that has led to changes in farming practices and increased production and productivity of their livestock.



IndoDairy Project

AGB/2012/099: Improving milk supply, competitiveness and livelihoods of smallholder dairy chains in Indonesia

More information about the IndoDairy Focus Farmers can be accessed here:

Muhammad Yunus: www.indodairy.net/id/news/focus-farmer-pak-yunus

Ma'mur M Komara: www.indodairy.net/id/news/focus-farmer-pak-mamur

Writers:

Attin Syahnurotin - Village Level Researcher (VLR) IndoDairy

Vyta W. Hanifah - Extension Program Coordinator of IndoDairy and Researcher of Balitbangtan, Ministry of Agriculture

Edited by:

Zita Ritchie – Dairy Extension Coordinator The University of Adelaide

Jack Hetherington – Coordinator of IndoDairy Project, The University of Adelaide's Centre for Global Food and Resources (CGFAR)

Design and layout:

Rio M Fauzan - Team Leader of Village Level Researcher (VLR) IndoDairy

For more information, contact us:

www.indodairy.net

[instagram.com/indodairyresearch](https://www.instagram.com/indodairyresearch)

[facebook.com/indodairy](https://www.facebook.com/indodairy)

