



**Young researchers (PhD and postdoc)
exchange networks at EU level**

***Technical innovation in cropping systems
under high collective constraints***

Call for proposals

1. Rationale - objectives

This initiative aims at mobilizing skills and expertise of several European Universities to set up an inter-institutional and multidisciplinary programme of research and capacity building, at the European level on the above topic.

The general objective of all the proposed research programmes will be to enlighten the conditions for technical innovation in smallholding tropical agriculture, under conditions of high collective constraints. The guiding issues of inquiry are to explain where, why and when sustainable innovations may appear in these conditions, then how they extend, and finally how to multiply and scale up such innovations. For such a topic, there is a need to integrate across disciplines, across scales, across stakeholders, and across components, and each single European institution is too small or too partially disciplinary oriented to stand alone in the international scientific debate.

This initiative is also part of a more general Natura-led initiative to organise networks between PhD students (and young post-docs) at the EU level and to open this network to the participation of young professionals and researchers from southern Universities and research centres.

The organisation of the network may lead to an Initial Training Network project under the People Programme of the FP7 (ex Marie Curie), to be submitted in 2008.

In a first stage, the network will be designed with the participation of young researchers and students who are presently working on the topic above, or intend to do so in the near future.

Exchange of experiences and organisation of a joint training programme for young researchers will be organised by the participating universities. This training programme will use the strengths and benchmarks of the various universities of the network. Such a framework should facilitate a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach of the assessment of innovations. Comparisons between empirical case studies brought forward by the participants will enlighten the conditions for technical economical and social change at the farmer and community levels.

Global programme negotiations will be organised with International Research organisations in Agriculture and Natural Resources Management (such as CGIAR Centers or other multilateral bodies). Connection with the demand and needs expressed by end-users in the South and civil society organisations will also be sought.

In a second step, additional means will be sought to offer PhD and research grants using EU mobility or to welcome third countries young researchers in the network.

2. Envisaged scope of the network

Agricultural systems in densely populated areas in the South are often intensive, high-value production systems (e.g., double or triple cropping of irrigated rice per year often with vegetables as major components, or fruits, livestock, and fisheries), due to the proximity to local urban markets and the often high agro-ecological potential. Innovation in this context, when it reflects an increased use of external inputs, is often associated with negative impacts on the quality of the natural resources (soil, water and air) and may be only possible for a limited number of farmers.

Furthermore, constraints which mostly come from the necessity of a collective organisation for the management of resources or markets may create additional limitations to the capacity of individuals to modify their own particular system. Such collective constraints exist, for example, in irrigation schemes where the distribution of water among co-users may limit the capacity of each of them to modify his cropping pattern. Control mechanisms over land use and labourers also influence the capacity of farmers to innovate and to intensify through soil and water management. Market organisation generated by pairs offering their products at coordinated times, or labour exchange rules may also lead to similar blockages.

The proposed research will aim at applying to such agricultural situations an integrated, multi-sectoral and participatory approach to clarify the capacity of individuals and groups to change their cropping and animal rearing practices while, when needed, resolving conflicts in land and resource use or market coordination.

However, this scope definition will be reviewed and modified accordingly during the launching workshop.

3. Initiating the network at Tropentag 2007

- ▷ Research teams interested to participate will be invited for a launching workshop which will be held as a side event of the Tropentag 2007 (Witzenhausen, Germany) on October 10, 2007.
- ▷ The launching workshop will be a closed meeting. Participation will reserved to invited participants that have expressed their will to join the network. Candidates can be individual or formal research teams with a convincing experience on the topic defined above. They will be required to send evidence of their experience¹
- ▷ For the logistic details on how to get to Witsenhausen, please consult the Tropentag website (<http://www.tropentag.de/>)

You are interested to participate?

*Formulate your application on free paper
and send it to both following addresses:*

michael.hauser@boku.ac.at
didier.pillot@supagro.inra.fr

¹ Title of the present research(es) undertaken on the topic above. If available, short concept notes (2 pages) + number of PhD or young researchers aiming at joining the network would be welcome. Main CVs of scholars and present researchers potentially involved will complete the application.