



**Brussels Policy Briefing no. 34**

*Farmer-driven research to improve food and nutrition security 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013*

JDE 52 (Jacques Delors Building, 99, rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels, 5th floor)  
<http://brusselsbriefings.net>

**AGRICORD**



**Farmers' organisations as interface - setting a farmer-driven research agenda**

Cees van Rij – Agriterra on behalf of AgriCord

Farmers worldwide are confronted with many challenges. Agricultural production needs to feed farmers' families but also the increasing urban population. Many farmers increasingly find themselves in a more market oriented environment. As a result they need to be able to choose and diversify their crops and livestock activities on the basis of market signals and to produce quality products based on market demands. Also environmental concerns such as climate change urge the development of alternative farming practices. These challenges call for a close working relationship between farmers and researchers.

**Institutional representation of farmers**

Current agricultural research insufficiently addresses farmers' needs nor do research results reach the farmers' fields. In the last decades more emphasis was given to the knowledge and skills of individual farmers and the need for a dialogue between farmers and researchers at grassroots level. But the main problem remains the lack of institutional relations between researchers and farmers at higher levels. Therefore, there is no or hardly any influence of farmers on the setting of research agendas nor on the communication of research results. In order to effectively reach the majority of the 1.2 billion farmers worldwide, the key challenge therefore is to establish structural linkages at all levels that make such influence possible and to change from linear institutional relationships to a triangular one at any level (see box).

**Outreach, commitment and impact**

The layered and widespread structures of farmers' organisations from grassroots to national level (and beyond) provide many opportunities for disclosing farmers' needs to research institutions and for disseminating research results to every remote corner in the world. Furthermore farmers' organisations can play a significant role in improving the enabling environment for agricultural innovation to take place, e.g. by providing extension services, inputs, marketing services, access to finance, etcetera. Through active involvement of farmers' organisations in setting the agenda for research, outreach, commitment and impact this can significantly improve, making research a much more economic viable activity.

**Setting the stage**

It is paramount that farmers and their organisations can meaningfully engage in networks and programme development of research institutions. Efforts need to be made to further develop the necessary capacity and appropriate conditions for farmers' organisations to participate effectively. As such, attention should be paid to the policies and regulations which shape the different areas in which they are active. Therefore there is a need to create room for the participation of farmer organisations in local, regional and international agricultural research arenas.

For more information please contact: [vanRij@agriterra.org](mailto:vanRij@agriterra.org)

