



NGRAC Meeting – February 15, 2023, Meeting Minutes

National Genetics Resources Advisory Council Members Present: Dr. Jim McFerson (Chair), Dr. Paul Gepts, Dr. Terrence Tiersch, Dr. Sarada Krishnan, Dr. John Buchanan, Dr. Stephen Kresovich, Dr. Margaret Smith – 7

Members Absent: Dr. Chad Dechow, Mr. Preston Hardison, Dr. David Butruille, Dr. Steven Kerns -- 4

Ex-Officio Present: Dr. Peter Bretting, Dr. Harvey Blackburn - 2

NAREEE Board Staff Present: Ms. Kate Lewis, NAREEE Board Executive Director/Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and Ms. Danielle Farley, Program Analyst

Guests Present: Gayle Volk, USDA-ARS

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Quorum Check, and approval of January 2023 meeting minutes
Call for a motion to approve meeting minutes from January by Kate Lewis. Jim McFerson provided edits, but Council members felt there were more needed. Paul Gepts suggested we include page numbers and put a footer of acronyms in the meeting minutes. Kate Lewis asked Paul Gepts to provide written feedback on specific edits and format. The Council agreed to have an email vote to approve minutes rather than defer until the Mar meeting.

II. Update on NGRAC Reports, National Plant Germplasm System Strategic Plan, and FY23 Council Members

DFO Lewis: Update on four NGRAC Reports, USDA-ARS National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) Strategic Plan, and FY23 Council members.

Two Secretarial briefing packages from NGRAC are being transferred to office of Secretary. One briefing package includes the four reports approved by the Board in February 2022 and one briefing package comprises NGRAC recommendations for the NPGS Plan. The Secretary will review and have a meeting with Kate Lewis and the Under Secretary. A response from the Secretary will be provided to the Council.

Jim McFerson – Expressed concern that there continues to be some confounding of the four reports and the NPGS Recommendations, which is directed to USDA-ARS. They are distinct and different products.

Kate - Was told by leadership that the briefing packages should be separate for the Secretary. They need to go through a very specific process that requires a clearance process with USDA

Secretary

Jim McFerson – This is appropriate as the two packages are distinctly different.

Kate – The secretary will provide guidance back to ARS and leadership.

Kate does not have an update on new members for or renewed members for the Council. The candidate slate for the Council is with the Under Secretary for review before the final approvals are made by the Secretary.

Peter Bretting – NPGS plan update. As far as he knows it is moving forward. He has not seen an update on the process for clearing the plan. It has left ARS and is now going through a variety of offices before it is approved by the Secretary. The 2018 Farm Bill states that the NPGS plan will be made public. In addition to this committee there are a lot of other stakeholders interested in seeing the plan, the status of the plan, and timelines for when the plan will be finished.

III. Remarks from Chair

Jim McFerson:

Pleased to hear we are making progress even though it seems slow and confusing. Looking forward to hearing more about the travel logistics for the in-person meeting, as well as today's two members' elevator pitches.

IV. Next Steps for in person meeting

- **Dates:** Tue 4/11 – Wed 4/12 (fly in on evening of Mon 4/10, fly out late afternoon/evening of Wed 4/12 or Thu 4/13). Possible visit to Denver Botanic Gardens.
- **Location:** Ft. Collins, CO
- **No update on travel.** Michele Simmons will reach out with required forms. Jim McFerson emphasized the importance of finalizing the air travel plans as soon as possible and urged Council members to quickly respond to emails seeking the necessary information.

V. Margaret Smith and Steve Kresovich presentation on topic priorities at Ft. Collins strategic planning session.

Steve Kresovich – provided an overview of the priorities in which NGRAC could help leverage to improve operations and impact of genetic resources management activities.

Jim McFerson – Do you know the 2020 Crop Science article by Coe et al.? They reported results from a survey of all plant breeding programs in the US. It is an important reference that should be shared before in-person meeting. Their conclusions on challenges to plant breeding programs align with Steve's suggestions.

Steve – Agreed with Jim.

Margaret – Agreed that we should share some references. She has some articles regarding indigenous genetic resources.

Paul – can you provide the reference you mentioned?

Jim – Yes, he will follow up via email with some background references for discussion during our in-person meeting. It would be helpful to hear more from a diverse expertise from the Council members, microbes, algae, animals.

Saradra – Stakeholder engagement is an important issue. She found out about NGRAC from an American Society for Horticultural Science meeting and made a presentation. More could be done at such technical meetings. She could share her slide show.

Margaret – Maybe we can have a standard slide deck that we can use to present and engage with stakeholders.

Terry – We have prepared documents on our website to share with stakeholders.

Jim – There is also an old slide deck that summarizes NGRAC background and activities that could be updated.

Kate - There is an existing slide deck that she will share with the members.

Margaret Smith presentation. (create summary from slides)

Two topics emerged from the maize Crop Germplasm Committee meeting.

1. Germplasm from discontinued public programs (best practices)

Questions/ Comments:

Jim – The Coe paper indicated around 50% of U.S. plant breeders are at retirement age across all crops This is a species agnostic approach, since collections of genetic resources from various organisms (animal, microbe, algae) are similarly endangered.

Harvey – On the plant side the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) has developed a set of guidelines that could cover many of the issues brought up here. On the animal side, a second set of guidelines through FAO has very recently been released. No need to reinvent the wheel.

Margaret – Very helpful to know about the FAO efforts.

2. Utilization

Paul – There is a technical aspect to this suggestion but also there are societal barriers for this suggestion. Do you see this effort as separate (technical and societal) or one effort?

Margaret – Identifying what the constraints are could be helpful so we can at least call the problem what it is.

Terry – We should take this approach for looking for cross-cutting themes to be able to approach the agnostic approach so we can see where things converge.

Margaret – These are very helpful topics. Reminding the council that ARS was directed by

Congress to focus on backlogs. That said, any novel and up-to date messages for communicating the impact of genetic resources is an effort well spent. This is an excellent idea.

Terry – The council is legislatively advisory in nature, specifically to advise USDA on internal approach, not for external stakeholders.

Peter – Good point. The Council provides recommendations directly to USDA. For example, recommendations on germplasm preservation could be utilized by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture in its grant programs.

VI. Meeting Adjourned

Jim McFerson thanked everyone for the work that they do. If anyone wants to share an elevator pitch on what is the most important topics for us to discuss moving forward, please let him know and it will be on the March meeting agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 2:01p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 15, 2023.