



NGRAC Meeting – September 20, 2023, Meeting Minutes

National Genetics Resources Advisory Council Members Present: Dr. Jim McFerson (Chair), Dr. John Buchanan, Dr. David Butruille, Dr. Paul Gepts, Mr. Preston Hardison, Dr. Stephen Kresovich, Dr. Sarada Krishnan, Dr. Margaret Smith, and Dr. Terrence Tiersch – 9

Members Absent: Drs. Chad Dechow, Steven Kerns – 2

Ex-Officio Present: Dr. Peter Bretting – 1

Ex-Officio Absent: Dr. Harvey Blackburn – 1

NAREEE Board Staff Present: Ms. Kate Lewis, NAREEE Board Executive Director/Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and Ms. Michele Simmons, Program Support Specialist

Guests Present: Dr. Brian Irish, USDA-ARS

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Quorum Check, and approval of August 2023 meeting minutes.

DFO Lewis welcomed the group, took roll call, and noted that the quorum was met. She asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from August 16th. All were in favor. Michele will work with the web team to get the August meeting minutes posted to the website.

DFO Lewis provided an update on the FY23 and FY24 nomination packages. She was informed through management from the Office of the Secretary that we should soon receive information on both nomination packages at the same time.

DFO Lewis informed the Committee that if the Federal Government shuts down and we don't have a Congressionally approved Farm Bill (FB) by October 1st, she and Ms. Simmons have been instructed to pause the work of the NAREEE Advisory Board and the Committees and Subcommittees.

The Committee stated they would like to proceed to meet on their own to work on the NGRAC work products if we don't have a FB in place by October 1st.

II. Remarks from Dr. Jim McFerson, NGRAC Chair

Dr. McFerson thanked Dr. John Buchanan, Dr. Chad Dechow, Mr. Preston Hardison, and Dr. Steven Kerns for their contributions to the NGRAC over the past years. DFO Lewis also thanked them for their areas of focus and their work efforts to support the NGRAC. Dr. McFerson asked about the status of the Deployment Paper. Dr. Butruille will ask Dr. Dechow to continue to assist working on the paper regarding the animal portion of the Germplasm Deployment report.

Dr. McFerson gave an update about his contribution to the REE Research Priorities Response letter. These were topics that were presented in the meeting last June that he attended. The three topics that were addressed were:

1. USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023 – 2026
2. REE Leadership Priorities and Activities
3. NAREEE Relevancy and Adequacy Report, FY 2023

The letter is complete and is being circulated for approval before sending it to Dr. Jacobs-Young.

Dr. McFerson also mentioned the possibility of having an in-person meeting twice a year for the NGRAC. He will work with DFO Lewis to see how we can make that work using funds within the NAREEE office budget.

DFO Lewis asked if there were any questions or comments. There were none.

III. Update on NGRAC reports

DFO Lewis noted that the office of Secretary Vilsack has provided two letters acknowledging five NGRAC work products. The first letter, dated 18 Sep 2023, concerned the NGRAC written response to the 2028 Farm Bill-mandated USDA-ARS National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) Strategic Plan. The second, dated 19 Sep 2023, concerned four NGRAC reports on genetics resource management of microbes; native crop wild relatives; livestock, poultry, and aquatic species; and algae. Both letters indicated the USDA would provide follow-up with the relevant agencies and offices for consideration and implementation. Dr. McFerson stated that he would appreciate any feedback from the Council on the specifics within the acknowledgement letters. He also asked DFO Lewis how these reports and the NGRAC response to the NPGS Strategic Plan will be appropriately distributed to the public.

DFO Lewis stated that the NGRAC reports are already posted on the NAREEE Advisory Board website. Regarding the NPGS Strategic Plan, while the Secretary has acknowledged the NGRAC recommendations, she suggested NGRAC should wait for the actual plan to be released to the public before we post the recommendations.

Dr. Butruille asked if the NGRAC is supposed to submit these reports and plans to Congress?

Dr. Bretting mentioned that the NPGS plan should be transmitted to the Congress, as requested in the 2018 Farm Bill. He wondered if this should be done at the Office of the Secretary level. It's been reviewed by multiple USDA agencies and cleared by the Office of Management and Budget, and it is now with the Office of the Secretary.

Dr. Tiersch stated that in the past it was the mandate of the NGRAC to generate these materials and move them forward to the Secretary's office. We've never had discussions before on why and how we would publicize the documents.

Dr. Smith noted that it might not make sense to post the recommendations for the NPGS Plan until the Plan is made public.

Dr. McFerson suggested we work with Dr. Jacobs-Young on how we could effectively follow up and contribute to consideration and implementation of the four reports, as well as providing further helpful feedback on the NPGS Strategic Plan. Dr. McFerson requested the Council consider the acknowledgment letters carefully and suggest appropriate next steps.

IV. Presentation of the Aquaculture Initiative, Next steps on NGRAC initiatives and action items, NPGS Crop Vulnerability Statements, and the Tribal document (Nov/Dec 2023 final)

Dr. Tiersch gave an update on the Aquaculture Initiative. He noted that while aquatic species are critical to global food security, very little work has been done with safeguarding of genetic resources compared to crop plants and livestock. This ongoing problem has been intensified by global climate change.

At a recent annual meeting of the Aquatic Species Committee of the USDA National Animal Germplasm Program, held in Fort Collins, a blueprint was drafted on how to move forward. A subsequent meeting was held at the National Agricultural Library, Washington, DC, in early September 2023 for a day and a half. It was a broad group of about 30 people. Six different teams focused on aspects ranging from infrastructure and capacity to workforce development to policy. The writing teams generated material which will be assembled into a document and a draft will be circulated widely to get more input.

Dr. Buchanan, who was part of that effort, thanked Dr. Tiersch for his update. He stated it was great to see multiple agencies within the government working together constructively and moving things forward.

DFO Lewis asked what federal agencies are working together on this project?

Dr. Tiersch reported the three main cooperating agencies are the Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dr. McFerson asked if there were any questions or comments. There were none.

Dr. Butruille gave an update on the Deployment Initiative. Draft four of the report is circulating with the ad hoc team to send their top recommendation to expand on the document.

Dr. McFerson asked if we can expect report out and updates on the deployment initiative.

Dr. Butruille informed the group that they will see updates as they become available.

Dr. McFerson indicated there has been progress on the Council's long-delayed report on NPGS Crop Vulnerability Statements. A revised draft is out with the working group members. He is hoping to hear back from them with comments in order to move forward.

Mr. Hardison gave an update on the Tribal document. He is hoping to have significant progress and a final draft by November or December 2023. He will continue to work on the document despite no longer serving as an official member of the Council. Dr. McFerson expressed appreciation for Mr. Hardison's efforts despite a very busy schedule and noted having appropriate technical experts outside of the NGRAC contribute to work products was completely acceptable.

DFO Lewis mentioned to the Committee that we may have to postpone the October Meeting if we don't have a Congressionally approved FB in place by the end of September, since Council activities would not be authorized. She and Ms. Simmons would be unable to provide administrative support in that situation. DFO Lewis will know more at the beginning of October and will provide an update. Dr. Smith volunteered to help organize a Zoom call for any Council members who could join and update on working group activities, recognizing that it would not be an official meeting to transact business.

V. **Wrap-up/Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m. EDT

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, October 18, 2023, at 1 p.m. EDT.

Acronyms: DFO: Designated Federal Official; NLGRP: National Laboratory for Genetic Resource Preservation; NAREEEAB: National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board; NPGS: National Plant Germplasm System; OBPA: Office of Budget & Program Analysis; OCS: Office of the Chief Scientist; OGC: Office of the General Counsel; OCR: Office of Congressional Relations.