



NGRAC Meeting – December 20, 2023, Meeting Minutes

National Genetics Resources Advisory Council Members Present: Dr. Jim McFerson (Chair), Dr. David Butruille, Dr. Paul Gepts, Dr. Stephen Kresovich, Dr. Margaret Smith, and Dr. Terrence Tiersch – 6

Members Absent: Dr. Sarada Krishnan – 1

Ex-Officio Present: Drs. Peter Bretting and Harvey Blackburn – 2

Guest: Dr. Gayle Volk, USDA-ARS

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

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Quorum Check and Updates

DFO Lewis welcomed the group, took roll call, and noted that the quorum was met.

- Ms. Simmons provided an update for the September 2023 NGRAC meeting minutes. She also talked about the process of receiving approval from DFO Lewis first and then the Council before posting the minutes to the NGRAC website for public review.
- Welcoming new FY23 Board members- DFO Lewis gave an update on the FY23 nomination package informing the Council Members that Secretary Vilsack made his selections from the candidate slates for the Board, Committee, Subcommittees, (including the new Pollinator Subcommittee) vacancies. The selections haven't been made public yet so the selectees names can't be revealed yet. This information should be made public in early January 2024 when we will start the onboarding process.
- Welcoming new FY24 Board members – The FY24 nomination package is still with the Office of the Secretary. Hopefully, the Secretary will make his final selections of FY24 candidates for the Board, Committee, and Subcommittees vacancies soon.
- Explaining the Continuing Resolution (CR) and the way forward – DFO Lewis discussed the Board's operations in terms of the authority and funding to continue their work. At the next meeting on January 17th, the NGRAC will be joined by Tyler Ellis from USDA's Office of the General Council. He will provide brief information about the CR, the Board's authority to operate, and how the CR and the Farm Bill work together. Mr. Bert Cramer from USDA's Office of Homeland Security will also be a guest at the January meeting. His portfolio revolves around

the international exchange of genetic resources and the homeland security impacts of that. Mr. Cramer looks forward to talking to the Council about his work and questions that the Council might have.

- Update on ARS National Plant Germplasm System Plan public release - Dr. Bretting stated the NGPS Plan was released to the media on November 17, 2023. Since then, the Plan has generated a lot of interest both nationally and internationally. The Plan is being circulated to some USDA contacts, various commodity groups, and an important supporter of the NPGS, the American Seed Trade Association. Dr. Bretting delivered a PowerPoint presentation to a group of colleagues about the NPGS Plan on the next steps going forward to get the information out and to keep spreading the word about the plan. Dr. Bretting informed the Council that he will be retiring January 13, 2024, but will start as a contractor part-time with ARS in the near future. He asked if there were any questions or comments. Dr. McFerson stated that the NGRAC will do their best to keep the NPGS plan moving forward. He thanked Dr. Bretting for his PowerPoint on the plan.

The Council individually thanked Dr. Bretting for his guidance, innovative ideas, good foresight, perspective, his interaction, and kindness in working with people.

DFO Lewis also thanked Dr. Bretting for his collegiality and his professionalism. She is glad to know that he will be able to mentor folks in the role of a National Program Leader as a contractor.

Dr. Bretting thanked everyone for their kind words and looks forward in staying connected to the Council.

II. Remarks from Dr. Jim McFerson, NGRAC Chair

Dr. McFerson thanked everyone for their well wishes to Dr. Bretting. He will send Dr. Bretting a letter of appreciation from him and on behalf of the Council.

III. Next steps on NGRAC initiatives and action items

- Deployment document update – Dr. Butruille stated progress is being made on the deployment document. He received input from some of the Council. Dr. Butruille will summarize a second version of the document once he gets input from other Council Members. Dr. Butruille asked if there were any comments or questions. Dr. McFerson stated that Dr. Butruille has made great progress and looks forward to the next few weeks and to keep the momentum going.
- NPGS Crop Vulnerability Statements – Dr. McFerson has an updated version of the NPGS Crop Vulnerability report. He would like to have one more meeting with Drs. Gepts, Krishnan, and Smith to complete the final draft before the next NGRAC meeting in January. Dr. Gepts stated that they need to agree on who the target group or population will be because it will affect comments. Dr. McFerson agreed.
- Tribal document - Dr. Hardison wasn't on the call to give an update on the Tribal document. DFO Lewis stated that Dr. Hardison's term ended at the end of September 2023. Dr. McFerson will follow up with Dr. Hardison for an update.
- Aquaculture update – Dr. Tiersch gave an update on the Aquaculture Initiative between the

USDA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Fish and the Wildlife Service. They met in San Antonio for the World Aquaculture Society meeting February 2023. The team is working to finalize the agenda for a three-hour session for the next meeting. It's intended to be a call of action and to get folks to interact with each other. Dr. Tiersch asked Dr. Blackburn if he had anything to add. Dr. Blackburn informed the Council that they reached out to some tribal colleagues to get their input into this effort which faces regulatory burdens and differences from state to state. This will play a role in how aquatic genetic resources are utilized.

- Planning the FY24 in-person public meeting – DFO Lewis suggested that Council Members start drafting an agenda, timing, and location for an in-person meeting. Dr. Tiersch noted that he can host the Council in Baton Rouge. Dr. Gepts also stated he can host the group at the University California Davis where they can possibly tour the National Clonal Germplasm Repository which includes tree fruit, nut crops & grapes. They could also tour the Tomato Genetic Resources Center that's funded by USDA, and other collections. Dr. McFerson stated he will work with Drs. Gepts and Tiersch on a potential agenda. He's looking forward to working with the Council in 2024.

IV. Wrap-up/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:58 p.m. EDT.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 21, 2024, 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.