



United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

**Research, Education, and Economics (REE)
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory
Board**

NGRAC Meeting – February 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes

National Genetics Resources Advisory Council Members Present: Drs. Jim McFerson (Chair), David Butruille, Paul Gepts, Stephen Kresovich, Sarada Krishnan, Mike Lomas, Troy Ott, Margaret Smith, and Terrence Tiersch - 9

Ex-Officio Present: Drs. Harvey Blackburn and Gayle Volk – 2

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

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Quorum Check and Updates

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

Simmons asked if there were any revisions or comments to the January 2025 minutes. There were none. The minutes were approved after a motion and a second motion. All approved the minutes, and none opposed. The January agenda and minutes will be posted to the NGRAC website.

II. Remarks from Dr. Jim McFerson, NGRAC Chair

McFerson welcomed the group. Because there were a lot of topics to discuss, he requested that the Patent and Trademark Office request for info on Experimental topic be moved to the March agenda.

III. Current Business

New member recruitment, vacancies, timeline

DFO Lewis explained that we normally start the process to recruit new members for vacant seats in January, which involves drafting a Federal Register Notice (FRN) to open the application process. She explained the timeline of the recruitment process from January to October 2025. October would be the estimated time when new members would be appointed by the USDA Secretary and onboarded. The FRN has been drafted, but the NAREEE staff has been informed that all FRNs are on hold now until further notice. DFO Lewis will keep Council members updated as information becomes available.

Annual meeting timing, location, agenda

McFerson stated that he did not receive any feedback on the draft annual meeting agenda that was discussed last month. He asked that the Council review the agenda and provide suggestions, if any, so that he and Lewis can move forward with finalizing the agenda.

National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) Crop Vulnerability and Deployment Report

Lewis stated that both reports were approved by the NAREEE Advisory Board. A transmittal package for both reports is being processed for routing approval. The NAREEE staff did receive information that acting Senior Advisors in the Secretary's office can review and clear packages to be routed for acknowledgement by the USDA Secretary.

Volk mentioned that Dr. Peter Bretting, retired Ex-Officio who is contracted by the USDA, is working on responses to the NPGS Crop Vulnerability report.

Tribal Document

McFerson asked the Council if they can vote to move the Tribal document (version7) topic to the March NGRAC agenda. None opposed. He did ask the Council to provide suggestions, if any, to him in order complete the final draft.

McFerson asked if there were any questions. There were none.

FY22/23 – NGRAC Recommendations for the NPGS Strategic Plan

Volk gave an update for the NPGS Strategic Plan. She stated that Dr. Bretting is reviewing the plan and responses to the recommendations before it goes to the Deputy Administrator, Crop Production and Protection, at the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) for their review and clearance.

FY22/23 – NGRAC reports: Algal, Animal, Microbial, and Crop Wild Relatives

Volk stated that the Microbial report recommendations are being worked on by Kirk Broder, Plant Pathologist, ARS. The report will then go to Bretting for his review and clearance. She stated that Dr. Caird Rexroad is working on the responses to the Algal report.

Blackburn stated that the response for the Animal report was completed. The report and response are believed to be with Dr. Jeff Silverstein, Associate Administrator, ARS, for his review and clearance.

Lewis stated that once all five reports have been cleared through ARS, she will provide the responses back to the NGRAC for their review and discussion.

Butruille asked if the responses to their recommendations can be posted to the NGRAC website?

Lewis stated that she will have to check on Butruille's question and will get back to the NGRAC with an answer.

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

IV. New Business

Group discussion: Personnel and Budget Issues in Administration Transition

- What can the NGRAC do to help germplasm collection managers and curators think about ways to prioritize their work under limited resources?
- Doing things that prevent loss is where the priority should be.
- Land grants, federal employees, and early career scientists are being impacted.
- Can a letter be written to the USDA Secretary about the importance of having a Director of the NPGS and the critical role that position plays? State what the return on investments to the US stakeholders will be.
- Can a quick survey be done of all the germplasm curators and find out how operations and reductions in staff are impacted?
- Curators should consult with the Centers for Disease Control
- Come up with a list of specific items to pursue
- Not able to pursue minimum number of activities since losing a research leader and curators. This has affected labs which are now underfunded
- Work together to offset losses at individual locations
- Recommend increasing partnerships, with public, private, and nonprofit sectors
- Find small ways to chip in and help public and private sectors
- Write representatives and senators to highlight germplasm situation and the existence of the gene banks

V. Wrap-up/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:58 pm ET.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, March 19, at 1 p.m. ET.

Acronyms: DFO: Designated Federal Official; NLGRP: National Laboratory for Genetic Resource Preservation; NAREEE AB: 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.