



## The Kernel

A Maize Genetics Cooperation community dispatch  
February 2024

### Hello MGC members!

Welcome to the first edition of **The Kernel**, a semi-annual dispatch for and by the MGC community. The Kernel will be published twice per year by the MGC Board of Directors (BoD) to keep our community informed about important events and issues. The Kernel will also include articles, tributes, and notices from the community. **If you wish to distribute information to the MGC community**, such as conference or job announcements, funding opportunities, or tributes, use this link <https://forms.gle/vH9bfohBeqMiYvrw5>. You can also always find additional information about the [MGC](#), new [papers](#), or other community resources on the [MaizeGDB](#) website.

In this issue of The Kernel, please read the summary from the MGC BoD and the annual MGC committee reports, if you plan to attend the 2024 Maize Genetics Meeting (MGM). *Reading these annual summaries ahead of time will help us dive more quickly into discussions during the Community Session (Saturday March 2 from 4:30-6:30 PM)! Members who are unable to attend the MGM and would like to provide feedback should send an email to [bod.mgc@gmail.com](mailto:bod.mgc@gmail.com).*

### In this issue:

1. MGC BoD Executive Summary and Note from Treasurer
2. Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee (MGAC) report
3. Maize Genetics Awards & Nominations Committee (ANC) report
4. Committee on Outreach, Diversity, Inclusion, & Education (CODIE) report
5. Maize Genetics Meeting Steering Committee (MGMSC) report
6. Maize Genetics Membership Committee (MGMC) report

### 1. MGC Board of Directors Executive Summary

*The Board:* Marna Yandeu-Nelson (Chair), Jay Hollick (Past Chair), Wojtek Pawlowski (Incoming Chair), Erin Sparks (Treasurer), Laurie Smith (Secretary) Michael Muszynski (Communications), Andrea Eveland (At-Large), Thelma Madzima (At-Large), Jeff Ross-Ibarra (At-Large)

The mission of the MGC is to advance the goals of the maize community in conducting maize research through collaboration and open sharing of ideas and resources. The Board of Directors carries out the business, fiscal and legal responsibilities of the cooperation, coordinates with the five MGC committees to foster a rich, interactive and recognized community, and works to anticipate and plan for future needs of the MGC. Over the past year, BoD highlights include:

- Increased interactions and communication with MGC membership by holding open BoD meetings on topics of importance to the community, including increasing belonging



within the MGC, as well as reports and conversation regarding MGC finances and MGAC goals and structure.

- Communicated with MGC members regarding actions that MGC committees are taking to foster an open and caring community in which we all feel a sense of belonging, including 1) partnering with the NSF-funded ROOT & SHOOT research coordination network to advance diversity, equity and inclusion within plant research societies and at research conferences; 2) participating in Bystander Intervention training to learn and practice strategies on how to intervene during situations in which people are being marginalized and how to respond to microaggressions; 3) developing culturally responsive mentoring programs, via a new committee within CODIE.
- Launched the community dispatch, “The Kernel”, led by the BoD’s Communications lead, Michael Muszynski. The Kernel will provide additional points of contact with MGC membership throughout the year, and update the community on (1) the progress the BoD and MGC committees are making on different issues, (2) the annual summary reports from each MGC Committee, and (3) any other information of broad relevance for the community.
- Coordinated with the MGMSC to finalize contracts for future Maize Meetings.
- Worked with CODIE and the MGMSC to update our Code of Conduct and Code of Conduct Violation response policy at the Maize Genetics Meeting.
- Worked with the MGAC to modify committee membership to more broadly represent the MGC community.

### *Thoughts from the Treasurer*

Thanks to the excellent financial management of outgoing Treasurer, David Braun, the MGC is back to pre-COVID financial stability! Looking ahead, current Treasurer Erin Sparks will work with the MGC committees to establish annual budgets and set up new endowments to secure the long-term financial status of MGC.

## **2. Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee (MGAC) report**

*Committee:* Jay Hollick (Chair), Richard Edema (Africa Rep), Mark Lubkowitz (PUI Rep), Uta Paszkowski (Europe Rep), and members of the Board of Directors

The mission of the Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee (MGAC) is to advance the interests of the international Maize Genetics community and to support advocacy-related activities such as communications with national funding agencies and stakeholders.

The MGAC’s role is to identify both the needs and the opportunities for maize genetics, and to communicate this information to the broadest possible life science community. Passage of the US 2022 CHIPS and Science Act has catalyzed new research and partnership opportunities for the Maize Genetics community, especially related to use-inspired research activities. Efforts are underway to help our community develop a strategic plan to define and act on achievable goals of agricultural innovation. The 2024 Maize Genetics Meeting (MGM) presents an ideal opportunity for furthering these discussions and coordination.

Over this past year, the MGAC debated and resolved to restructure its membership to both broaden community interests and further distinguish its representation and roles from those



of the MGC Board of Directors (BoD). Upon incorporating MGC as a non-profit, the MGAC organization consisted of all elected BoD members and five committee-appointed representatives. Moving forward, the MGAC will consist of four elected BoD members (Communications Director plus the Incoming, Outgoing, and current Chair), three elected MGC at-large members, and up to six appointed members each representing Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, Industry, and Primarily Undergraduate Research Institutions. Appointed positions are filled via an election within the MGAC and will be for a maximum of three years. One at-large MGAC member will be elected each year beginning 2024. Further details and transition plan can be found in the updated MGAC [charge document](#) posted on the MGC website.

The Committee hosts the Community Session at the annual Maize Genetics Conference which includes reports and updates from all MGC Committees as well as key stakeholders such as the National Corn Growers Association, National Science Foundation, and the US Department of Agriculture. This activity includes an interactive community discussion that helps fuel the Committee's advocacy efforts. Additionally, the Committee is charged with formulating and conducting a community-wide survey to both drive initiatives and monitor progress. This past year there was also a report provided at one of the MGC BoD public meetings.

The MGAC also partners with the Awards & Nominations Committee in the selection process for the annual MGC McClintock Prize. This year's awardee, Professor Dame Caroline Dean from the John Innes Center (JIC), will be accepting her award at the 2024 MGM. The award announcement was made by the JIC last October 10, in honor of the date McClintock was notified of her Nobel Prize award.

### **3. Maize Genetics Awards & Nominations Committee (ANC) report**

The 2024 ANC is composed of community members who represent a broad range of expertise, experience levels, and institutions: Andrea Eveland (Chair, BoD liaison, 2025), Jim Birchler (2024), Eli Borrego (2024), Marja Timmermans (2024), Graziana Taramino (2025), Jianming Yu (2025), John Fowler (CODIE liaison, 2026), Matt Hufford (2026), Carolyn Rasmussen (2026), and Paula McSteen (ex-officio).

The ANC is charged with two main activities: 1) coordinating nominations for the elected Board of Directors and MGAC positions and 2) conducting the nomination and selection or shortlisting process for community and McClintock awards. In fall 2023, Andrea Eveland became committee chair and Paula McSteen remains on the ANC as ex-officio. This year, three new committee members have joined the ANC and will serve through 2026.

A major accomplishment for the ANC this last year was the drafting and revising of a finalized rubrics documentation. These rubrics were developed to encourage standardization of nomination packages, largely by providing guidelines to letter writers so as to minimize biases. Minor changes to the award descriptions have also been implemented with the expectation of extending the nominations pool to be more inclusive of non-US-based candidates and industry candidates. The rubrics also provide transparency on how candidate nomination packages are scored for each award. The ANC works hard to identify potential deserving nominees for each award and solicit their nomination packages to ensure a large pool of candidates that maximize



diversity, geography and discipline. The rubrics documentation can be found here:

<https://maizegdb.org/mgc/awards/rubric.php>

Results and statistics related to award winners and nominations will be provided at the 2024 MGC Community Session.

#### **4. Committee on Outreach, Diversity, Inclusion, & Education (CODIE) report**

*Committee:* Irina Makarevitch (Chair), John Fowler (Secretary), Andrew Egesa (Programming, Participation, and Community Development Chair), Beth Thompson (Outreach, Recruitment and Retention Chair), Carson Andorf (MaizeGDB), Hank Bass (MGMSC), Penelope Lindsay (RCN Workshop Report Writing Working Group), Thelma Madzima (BoD), Sylvia Morais de Sousa (MGMSC), Laurie Smith (BoD, ROOT & SHOOT), Robyn Allscheid, Prameela Awale, Amruta Bapat, Natalia de Leon, Rita Hayford, David Jackson, Thanduanlung Kamei, Rajdeep Singh Khangura, Hong Li, Le Liu, Adrienne Moran Lauter, John Portwood, Paul Scott, Brandi Sigmon, Thu Tran, Aimee Uyehara, Clinton Whipple

The Maize Genetics Committee for Outreach, Diversity, Inclusion, and Education (CODIE) is charged with increasing the equitable representation of people based on race, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, and any other attribute, within the Maize Genetics Cooperative and its leadership; within the area of Maize Genetics; and within the broader field of STEM education, research, and industry. CODIE comprises several subcommittees and working groups focusing on different projects throughout the year. The highlights from 2023 include efforts in recruitment and support of scientists from diverse backgrounds and encouraging education in the field of diversity and inclusion.

As a part of its annual activities, CODIE collects and reviews [applications](#) and makes award recommendations for the Maize Genetics Network Enhancement via Travel (MaGNET), Expanding Institutional Access (EIA), and Disciplinary Breadth (DB) Awards that seek to recruit and retain scientists from diverse backgrounds, fields, and institutions into the maize research community via supporting travel and engagement at the annual Maize Genetics Meeting. Programming at the MGM organized by CODIE to support awardees included a mentoring program, support for lightning talk presentations, networking luncheons, and pre-meeting networking.

CODIE selects the speaker for the Fostering Diversity in the Maize Research Community Talk at the Meeting and organizes the interactions with the speaker at the meeting (2024 Speaker is [Ricardo Salvador](#)). Throughout the year, the committee encourages MGC members to continue to learn by [highlighting research of interest](#) toward advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the maize community and beyond.

During 2023, CODIE collaborated with several groups within MGC and across other plant organizations in developing and implementing recommendations for inclusive conferences, effective mentoring, and opportunities for training. A significant portion of this effort was in alignment with the plant science-wide, NSF-supported [ROOT & SHOOT](#) RCN project, and its [Inclusive Conferences Working Group](#). The committee also engaged in updating the committee bylaws to better reflect the goals of CODIE and to ensure dynamic and diverse representation of MGC members as part of the committee.



#### CODIE Accomplishments for 2023:

- Providing recommendations to the BoD for better supporting discussions around the Fostering Diversity plenary at the Maize Genetics Meeting.
- Supporting participation in Bystander Intervention Training for MGC members, aimed at improving safety and responsiveness at the Maize Genetics Meeting for members of marginalized groups (in collaboration with ROOT & SHOOT).
- Implementing recommendations from the ROOT & SHOOT Inclusive Conferences Working Group at the Maize Genetics Meeting, including attendance by a [neutral ombudsperson](#), Bathabile Mthombeni; increased conference accessibility and revised guidelines (in collaboration with the MGM Steering Committee).
- Developing a plan to enhance [culturally-responsive mentoring](#) in MGC-sponsored mentoring programs (in collaboration with ROOT & SHOOT).

#### Upcoming opportunities, supported by or aligned with CODIE:

- Attend a [Bystander Intervention Workshop](#) in February and May, 2024 - free for all who [register](#) by Feb. 5 or May 22.
- [Apply](#) to be a Meeting Mentor for the MGM's MaGNET program
- At the MGM, ask questions about the proposed [ICWG Community Agreement](#), which seeks to “present a collective vision for how we, the Plant Sciences community, want to define our values and set expectations and measures for accountability for ourselves, our staff, and all affiliated participants of our collective gatherings.” The Inclusive Conferences Working Group recommends that the MGC should adopt this agreement, in addition to, or in place of, the existing [Code of Conduct](#).

### 5. Maize Genetics Meeting Steering Committee report

The MGMSC Steering Committee in charge of organizing the 2024 Maize Meeting includes: Rubén Rellán Álvarez (Chair), Sherry Flint-Garcia (Co-Chair), Matthew Hufford (Past Chair), Oyenike Adeyemo (Africa Representative), Frank Hochholdinger (Europe Representative), Petra Wolters (Industry Representative), Madelaine Bartlett, Hank Bass, Lander Gadelmann (Student Representative), Sarah Jensen (Industry Representative), Sylvia Morais de Sousa Tinoco (Latin America Representative), Stephanie Klein (Postdoc Representative), Graziana Taramino (Industry Representative) and Feng Tian (Asia Representative).

Ex-officio members: Erin Sparks (Treasurer), Marty Sachs (Guru), Carson Andorf (MaizeGDB Representative), Darwin Campbell (Planning/Audio Visual), John Portwood (Abstract, Website Coordinator) and Tricia Simmons and Garrett Simmons (Conference Managers)

#### Here are some highlights from our work this year:

- As of January 26, 2024, the meeting has around 475 attendees, close to the number of attendees we had last year. We have had 315 abstract submissions plus 30 abstracts that were selected for short talks and six keynote talks, including the McClintock Award. We are slowly recovering from the effects of the pandemic [MGM\\_Abstract\\_Attendees\\_Historic](#)
- Income has been reduced from last year. We have received \$57.5K from industry sponsors and \$28K from an NSF 3-year grant that Candice Hirsch submitted. The NSF grant has allowed us to provide travel, housing, and registration for 13 attendees. In addition, we have





collaborated with ROOT & SHOOT to support another 6 attendees who will attend the Maize Meeting for the first time. We have also been able to provide hotel support for all students who requested it.

- For the first time, funded by ROOT & SHOOT and in collaboration with the BoD and CODIE, we will have an ombudsperson providing their support and services to all attendees.
- We have created a social forum for all members of the MGC to facilitate communication and organization between members <https://maize.circle.so/>
- Steering committee member Frank Hochholdinger has secured a venue and hotel in Cologne, Germany to organize the maize meeting in 2026. Contracts have been signed by the BoD.

## **6. Maize Genetics Membership Committee report**

*Committee:* Natalie Nannas (Chair), Carson Andorf, Alex Brohammer, Candy Hirsch, Bharath Kunduru, Jason Lynn, Bob Meeley, Sara Miller, Wojtek Pawlowski, Thu Tran

The Membership committee is responsible for recruitment, retention, enrollment and engagement of Maize Genetics Cooperation members, as well as maintenance of a secure membership database. We work with the Board of Directors to contribute to the annual budget, and develop and support community programming through membership due rates. Our 2023-2024 committee consists of six at large members representing academia, industry and government as well as three graduate student and postdoctoral members. During this past year, our committee worked on the development of membership benefits, including a virtual Career Development Workshop (held in May 2023 and another this coming spring 2024), a mentoring program, discounted rates for the Maize Genetics Meeting, and member appreciation gifts. We continue to work on streamlining the membership renewal processes, and its alignment with meeting registration. The MGC community currently has 496 members (as of January 2024).

Thank you for reading the first edition of The Kernel. We welcome feedback, so please email us at [bod.mgc@gmail.com](mailto:bod.mgc@gmail.com).

To submit entries for consideration for the next edition of The Kernel, please use this link: <https://forms.gle/vH9bf0hBeqMiYvrw5>