



The Kernel

A Maize Genetics Cooperation community dispatch
March 3, 2025

Hello MGC members!

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of **The Kernel**, a semi-annual dispatch for and by the MGC community. The Kernel is published twice per year by the MGC Board of Directors (BOD) to keep our community informed about important events and issues. The Kernel also includes articles, tributes, and notices from the community. **If you wish to distribute information to the MGC community**, such as conferences 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 2025 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 8 from 4:30-6:00 PM)!* Members who are unable to attend the MGM and would like to provide feedback should send an email to bod.mgc@gmail.com.

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1. MGC Board of Directors Community Message

By Wojtek Pawlowski, MGC BOD Chair

The Board: Wojtek Pawlowski (Chair), Marna Yandea-Nelson (Past Chair), Matthew Hufford (Incoming Chair), Erin Sparks (Treasurer), Laurie Smith (Secretary) Michael Muszynski (Communications), Andrea Eveland (At-Large), John Fowler (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.



We recognize that ongoing changes from the new administration pose a significant challenge to the community. From executive orders that go against the stated principles of our MGC, to frozen grants and threats to indirect cost funds, to the recent mass firings of government employees, we know that these events have impacted many members of our community. The BOD is working to navigate this unprecedented situation and to understand the legality of some of the recent policy changes and how they may impact the MGC. Our recent letter to the MGC community is attached to the end of this newsletter as well. The BOD particularly appreciates the efforts of the MGMSC and CODIE to make the upcoming Maize Genetics Meeting possible in an unstable environment.

The BOD firmly believes that many of these actions threaten the US scientific enterprise, and we are looking to respond in a vigorous way. We believe that the community session at the MGM will offer an opportunity for the maize community to come together to address the continuing upheaval.

2. Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee (MGAC) report

By Marna Yandeu-Nelson, MGAC Chair

The Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee (MGAC) is charged with advancing the interests of the International Maize Genetics Community. The committee strives to identify both the needs and the opportunities for the maize genetics community and communicate this information to the broadest possible life science community. As such, we support advocacy-related activities such as communications with national funding agencies and stakeholders.

Activities over the past year and plans for the coming year:

- Hosted the annual Community Session at the Maize Genetics Meeting, which includes updates from all MGC committees as well as information from key stakeholders (NSF, USDA, National Corn Growers Association), and interactive community discussion that fuels the committee's advocacy efforts.
- Provided a description of MGAC activities during a public Board of Directors meeting, sharing plans to broaden MGAC membership and recruit community members with passion for and successes in advocacy work.
- MGC elected first At-Large member to the MGAC committee and is currently soliciting nominations to fill a second At-Large position on the committee
- Supported the Awards and Nominations Committee in selecting the annual recipient of the McClintock Prize and managed the press release of this award. This year's awardee, Dr. Ed Buckler, plant geneticist at USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and an adjunct professor in the School of Integrative Plant Science at Cornell University, will be accepting the award at the 2025 MGM. The announcement was made by Cornell University on October 10, 2024, in honor of the date that Barbara McClintock was notified of receiving the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1983.



Moving forward, the MGAC plans to:

- Continue recruitment of new members
- Administer a community wide survey to drive initiatives that are important to and benefit our research community
- Partner with federal funding agencies and other stakeholders, and organize workshops for developing strategic priorities
- Pursue a new Research Coordination Network grant that integrates an industry internship component for early career maize scientists

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

By Andrea Eveland, ANC Chair

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.

Andrea Eveland continues as the ANC chair until the fall of 2025, at which time she will move to an *ex-officio* role. Elizabeth “Toby” Kellogg will become the new committee chair and serve in this role for 2026 and 2027. In addition to Toby, three additional new committee members joined the ANC this year and will serve through 2027.

The 2025 ANC is composed of community members who represent a range of expertise, experience levels, and interest groups: Andrea Eveland (Chair, 2025), Graziana Taramino (2025), Jianming Yu (2025), Matt Hufford (2026), Carolyn Rasmussen (2026), Toby Kellogg (Incoming Chair, 2027), Natalia de Leon (2027), Thomas Dresselhaus (2027), Devin O’Connor (2027).

Last fall, the ANC rolled out new rubrics, which were developed to encourage standardization of nomination packages, largely by providing guidelines to letter writers so as to minimize biases. As a committee, we’ve observed significant improvements in the nomination letters, which now focus on the information used to score nominees in a more standard way. We see this as a huge success! The rubrics also provide transparency on how candidate nomination packages are scored for each award. Of course, *we are interested in your feedback* as letter writers - *have the rubrics been helpful and what (if anything) can be improved?*

Let us know!

The rubrics documentation can be found here: <https://maizegdb.org/mgc/awards/rubric.php>

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 in discipline, geography, sector (industry vs academic), etc. Since there are so many amazing and deserving members of our community, we typically have candidates nominated year after year. To keep our nomination pools active, beginning this year the ANC will solicit nomination packages for a given nominee for three years, after which time they must be nominated again by the community without solicitation.



Another important change this year was to shift our call for R. Emerson Lifetime Award nominations a year earlier as is done for the McClintock Prize. We hope that this extra time will facilitate travel plans for Emerson awardees who do not regularly attend the meeting to accept their award in person, if possible.

Results and statistics related to award winners and nominations will be provided at the 2025 MGC Community Session.

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

By Brandi Sigmon, CODIE Chair

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. CODIE also completed and adopted new bylaws in 2024 defining committee structure, composition, and terms of membership, which will ensure the long-term stability of the committee.

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 travel support and engagement at the annual Maize Genetics Meeting. CODIE-organized programming at the MGM included a mentoring program, support for lightning talk presentations, and structured networking opportunities. CODIE also selects the speaker for the Education, Community, and Outreach Talk at MGM and organizes interactions with the speaker at the meeting (the 2025 Speaker is Dr. Helen Anne Curry).

CODIE has also continued collaborations with other plant science organizations through the NSF-supported RCN project, ROOT & SHOOT. CODIE members were actively involved in key projects including the Inclusive Conferences Working Group (ICWG) and the Mentor Training Working Group. Recommendations from ICWG have been adopted to improve the conference experience at MGM for everyone. Members of CODIE also served on the ROOT & SHOOT Steering Committee and attended the planning retreat at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in November 2024 to co-create goals for the remainder of the project funding period.

5. Maize Genetics Meeting Steering Committee report



By Sherry Flint-Garcia, MGMSC Chair

The Maize Genetics Meeting Steering Committee is in charge of organizing the 2025 Maize Meeting and includes:

Sherry Flint-Garcia (Chair), Frank Hochholding (Co-Chair; Europe Representative), Rubén Rellán Álvarez (Past Chair), Oyenike Adeyemo (Africa Representative), Hank Bass, Keting Chen (Postdoc Representative), Melissa Draves (Student Representative), Sarah Jensen (Industry Representative), Sylvia Morais de Sousa Tinoco (Latin America Representative), Katie Murphy, Cinta Romay, Graziana Taramino (Industry Representative), Feng Tian (Asia Representative), and Petra Wolters (Industry Representative).

Ex-officio members include: Erin Sparks (Treasurer, BOD Liaison), Sarah Miller (Membership Liaison), 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).

We held monthly meetings to plan the 2025 meeting. Here are some highlights from this year:

- Following the 2024 meeting, the SC implemented the 2024 post-meeting survey to request community feedback regarding the meeting. We have incorporated many of these suggestions into planning for the upcoming 2025 meeting. For example, we moved poster lightning talks sessions earlier in the meeting to better advertise for their posters, we changed the evening social event to something different than trivia, and we added transparency in how talks were selected.
- We worked with the Board of Directors on the budget for the 2025 meeting and renewed the contract with Conference Direct to provide professional conference support.
- We worked with the CODIE and the Board of Directors to offer ombudsperson support and services to the 2025 meeting attendees.
- We worked with the MGC Awards Committee to plan the 2025 awards session and the MGC Board of Directors to plan the 2025 community session.
- We invited four keynote speakers and reviewed 84 abstracts to fill the 28 short talk speaker slots. We also worked with the Board of Directors to review 108 abstracts to select 30 poster lightning talks.
- Income (excluding registration) is roughly the same as last year. We have received \$42K from industry sponsors thus far (and word from a recent sponsorship should bring us to last year's level) and \$28K from an NSF 3-year grant for the MGC written by Candice Hirsch. The NSF grant has allowed us to provide combinations of travel, housing, and registration support for 12 attendees. In addition, via the MGC's participation in the ROOT & SHOOT RCN project, another two first-time attendees have been supported to attend the meeting. We have also been able to provide hotel support for the ~140 students who requested it.
- We worked with Conference Direct to identify potential Midwest venues for the 2027 meeting. Six cities were considered and ultimately, the Board of Directors voted to approve the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago, IL for the dates March 10-14, 2027.
- By the time of the meeting, we will have chosen a new incoming chair for the 2027 meeting.



- As of February 7, 2025, the meeting had around 470 attendees, close to the number of attendees we had at this time in 2023 for St. Louis and 300 registered posters.

See you all in St. Louis!

6. Maize Genetics Membership Committee report

By Paul Scott, MGMC Chair

Committee: Paul Scott (Chair), Alex Brohammer, Liz Conrad, Mateus Mondin, Sara Miller, Tony Studer, Sumeet Mankar

The Membership committee is responsible for recruitment, retention, enrollment and engagement of Maize Genetics Cooperation members. We serve as the first point of contact for MGC community members with questions about the organization. We maintain a database of MGC member information and respond to data calls regarding our membership demographics. The 2024-2025 committee consists of six at large members representing academia (including a primarily undergraduate institution), industry, and government as well as one graduate student member, with a vacant position for a postdoctoral scientist. During the past year, our committee organized and hosted activities designed to add value to MGC membership including a virtual Career Development Workshop (May, 2024) that was moderated by Karen Menzel (Iowa State University) and featured speakers from academia (Arif Ashraf, Howard University), government (Nick Gladman, USDA-ARS) and a research institution (Katie Murphy, Donald Danforth Plant Science Center). We also organized a mentoring program at the Maize Genetics Meeting, and distributed refrigerator magnets featuring artwork from the maize genetics community as member appreciation gifts. We continue to work on improving communication with other MGC committees to clearly define committee roles and to ensure the organization functions efficiently.

Thank you for reading this edition of The Kernel. We welcome feedback, so please email us at bod.mgc@gmail.com.

To submit entries for consideration for the next edition of The Kernel, please use this link: <https://forms.gle/vH9bfohBeqMiYvrw5>