

# Protocol from the fifty-fourth PlantLink steering committee meeting

**Date: 24 September 2024, 9:00-12:00**

**Place: Room Triticum, Horticum house, SLU Alnarp**

*Present:* Svend Christensen, KU (chair); Allan Rasmusson, LU; Jean W.H. Yong, SLU; Mariette Andersson, SLU (deputy director); Sofia Marmon, LU; Erik Andreasson, SLU (until 10:30), Vivian Schmitt, LU (PhD students' representative), Alf Ceplitis, Lantmännen Lantbruk AB; Leif Bülow, LU (vice-chair)

Erik Alexandersson, SLU (acting director); Olivier Van Aken, LU (assistant director); Anna Maňourová, SLU (coordinator)

*Online:* Andreas Gustavsson Fredlund, SLU (economist)

*Absent with valid impediment:* Esther Kuper SLU (PhD students' representative)

## **1. Opening of the meeting**

Svend Christensen opened the meeting.

## **2. Election of the person in charge of verifying the minutes**

Jean Yong agreed to be the verifier of the minutes.

## **3. Minutes of the previous meeting**

Svend Christensen reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting. The minutes were approved.

## **4. Messages** *Erik Alexandersson, Anna Maňourová*

- Borgeby Fältdagar – PlantLink hosted a panel discussion, “AI for the future of plant breeding and agriculture”, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, from 14:00-14:30 in the SLU tent. Aakash Chawade (SLU) was the panel leader, marking the start of PlantLink Focus Group on “AI-driven transformation”.
- PlantLink and Roland von Bothmer hosted a seminar by Prof. Kazuhiro Sato at SLU Alnarp on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August. Almost 50 attendees signed up!
- Department rounds dialogue about the future of PlantLink – Erik and Anna have already presented at the departments of Plant Breeding and Biosystems and Technology (SLU); the presentation at Plant Protection Biology will take place on October 2. Sofia and Allan will assist in arranging a similar activity at LU.
- Øystein Opedal, Dept of Biology, LU, received an ERC starting grant.
- Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Food Production will be established in Alnarp. SLU and Sparbanken Skåne are jointly founding this initiative with a budget of 50 MSEK.
- NBPPN (Nordic-Baltic Plant Phenotyping Network) - The annual meeting will take place on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November in Båstad.
- The Next Newsletter will be released on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September.
- 27<sup>th</sup> of September – PhD defence of Abraham Ontiveros, former PlantLink Steering Committee member; supervisor: Olivier Van Aken.
- PlantLink Day updates: Paleobotanist Karl Ljung, LU, cannot attend; PlantLink is searching for his replacement.
- ADVALUE and NewClim updates: SLU will host four researchers from East African universities as part of the ADVALUE Erasmus + project from September 30 until October

4 in Alnarp and Ultuna. NewClim developed an informational movie and is launching a learning platform for students at the beginning of 2025.

- LUPS meetings are starting again; the upcoming ones: 04/10, 08/11. PlantLink will join in the meetings to present during the November slot.
- Leif Bülow informed that a ScanOats-related project had gone to the final hearing for the Formas Contingency planning and competitiveness in the food system – a call for transdisciplinary centres; a new call on [carbon dioxide conversation from SSF](#).
- Leif and Sofia attended the [Ystad summit](#), mainly sections on food production and resilience. It was a great place to network with different stakeholders!
- Mariette Andersson informed about KBS seminar on 19/10 at the Department of Plant Breeding, SLU.

## **5. Financial status report; *Andreas Gustavsson Fredlund***

Andreas Gustavsson Fredlund presented PlantLink's budget report. According to the prognosis, 141,000 SEK must be spent before the end of the year. Membership fees for EPSO, NBPPN, and PBN total around 100,000 SEK. 50,000 SEK should be reserved for PlantLink Day and another 50,000 SEK for PlantLink Focus Group Discussions. ELLS input might be lower than estimated. reserved Is there a risk of getting into negative numbers?

## **6. PlantLink's current status, HoDs discussions and funding opportunities; *Erik Alexandersson, Olivier Van Aken***

Erik, Olivier, and Anna discussed PlantLink's future with the Heads and Deputy Heads of Departments at SLU and LU. A summary has been circulated to them for feedback and to the steering committee. The updated document will be sent to the deans of the three participating faculties by 30 September.

What are the other funding sources apart from the faculty's sponsorship?

*Novo Nordisk Fonden* – A new call could be created as an open expression of interest centred around PlantLink's Industrial Mentorship Program. Olivier, Erik, Svend, and Anna will discuss further and present a suggestion at the next meeting.

*Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Food Production (SLU-Sparbanken Skåne)* – The 50 MSEK initiative centres around primary production, which seems close to PlantLink's scope. Erik and Anna will meet with Håkan Schroeder to discuss the new centre's role in relation to PlantLink.

*University of Kristianstad + LU project around food science* – John Yong explained more about the project (e.g. mapping the terroir for cool climate grapes in southern Sweden, optimised agronomic practices for grape cultivation in southern Sweden, wine making, etc). It was discussed whether PlantLink could have more university members on board. E.g. Kristianstad University Collage, Linneus University, Malmö University.

*Formas communication grant (plant blindness/awareness)* – The application's deadline is 23 October. There are some new members on board in our application. At the high school level, plant physiology is one of the most disliked parts of Biology A.

*Royal Physiographic Society of Lund* – could be interested in funding PlantLink Day.

*The meetings of the deans of the three LU faculties NMT*– talks with the new deans at LU

[Photosyntech](#) – A Norwegian plant science research school involving all Norwegian universities. PhD students participate in outreach activities, such as website and social media management, and receive credits for the activities. Could this model be adapted for PlantLink?

#### Other thoughts

PlantLink should actively seek opportunities in Denmark and promote Swedish-Danish collaboration within the network. One example mentioned: [SEGES Innovation](#) (Danish producers' annual meeting).

Visibility remains one of PlantLink's key strengths and is crucial for PhD students, postdocs, young researchers, and other stakeholders. As a network, we are well-positioned with GDPR-compliant email lists.

#### **7. Update on Focus groups with roundtable discussions, PlantLink Day 2024; Anna Maňourová**

Two focus groups are being formed on the themes of "Preserving biodiversity and reducing pesticide use in agriculture" under the leadership of Kamil Demski, SLU, and "Advancing plant bioinformatics, agri-tech, and crop phenotyping in AI-driven transformation", led by Aakash Chawade, SLU. An invitation to SLU's new Prof of Digitalization, [Abozar Nasirahmadi](#), was mentioned.

Both groups have five confirmed members and are searching for a few additional ones. The first meetings are scheduled for October, and templates for the final reports have been shared with the group leaders.

#### **8. EPSO general assembly; Anna Maňourová**

Anna provided an overview of EPSO's activities, particularly focusing on New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) and their future prospects. Jens Sundström and Anna will share minutes from the assembly after October.

#### **9. Any other business; Erik Alexandersson**

The Committee continued discussions on PlantLink's future post-2024, including potential funding sources and key activities to maintain.

If no funding is secured for 2025, we aim to retain PlantLink's website domain and continue holding online Steering Committee meetings, though at a reduced frequency.

#### **10. Next meeting; Svend Christensen**

The next meeting will be held online on October 10, 13-14:00. The last meeting for 2025 will be in Lund on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 9-11:30, before the PlantLink Day.

#### **16. Closing of the meeting; Svend Christensen**

Svend Christensen closed the meeting.

#### Signed by

Anna Maňourová – secretary

Jean Yong – verifier of the minutes

Svend Christensen – chair

# Signature page

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