

Protocol from the fifty-sixth PlantLink Steering Committee meeting

Date: 26 February 2025, 13:00-16:00

Place: Room Triticum, Horticum, SLU Alnarp

Present: Svend Christensen, KU (chair); Allan Rasmusson, LU; Mariette Andersson, SLU (deputy director); Vivian Schmitt, LU (PhD students' representative), Alf Ceplitis, Lantmännen Lantbruk AB; Esther Kuper SLU (PhD students' representative); Sajeevan Radha Sivarajan, SLU; Carin Jarl-Sunesson, Lund Botanical Garden

Olivier Van Aken, LU (director); Anna Maňourová, SLU (coordinator)

Online: Sofia Marmon, LU; Jens Sundström, SLU

Absent with valid impediment: Jean W.H. Yong, SLU; Leif Bülow LU (vice-chair)

1. Opening of the meeting

Svend Christensen opened the meeting.

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

Sajeevan Radha Sivarajan agreed to be the verifier of the minutes.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved.

4. Messages *Olivier Van Aken, Anna Maňourová*

- Membership fees

PlantLink successfully contributed to EPSO (European Plant Science Organisation) membership in collaboration with the Department of Plant Biology, SLU, and Jens Sundström. Additionally, PlantLink fully covered memberships for the Plant Biologicals Network (PBN) and the Scandinavian Plant Physiology Society (SPPS). The Nordic-Baltic Plant Phenotyping Network (NBPPN) was covered by UPSCALE-NordPlant, coordinated by Sajeevan Radha Sivarajan.

- Forskningsnätet Skåne

Forskningsnätet Skåne reached out to PlantLink for assistance in identifying SLU researchers willing to [mentor a school student](#) for a two-week summer program. Sajeevan and Anna have taken on this opportunity.

- NordGen farewell to Lise Lykke Steffensen

After eight years, the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen) is welcoming a new director, [Lene Krøl Andersen](#), who will take office on March 15. NordGen is organising a farewell reception for Lise Lykke Steffensen, who has collaborated closely with PlantLink, on March 5. Committee members are encouraged to attend; Olivier and Anna will be there.

- Bluesky

The Bluesky social media platform is gaining attention among scientists and academics. [PlantLink](#) has now joined, alongside NordGen and the Department of Biology at LU.

6. EPSO updates, Jens Sundström, Anna Maňourová

Jens Sundström from the Department of Plant Biology, SLU, provided updates on NGTs legislation and future perspectives. You can read his **summary** below:

In June 2023, the European Commission (EC) proposed new legislation regarding New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) related to crops bred with site-directed nucleases such as CRISPR/Cas9. Before adoption, the legal proposal needs to pass both the European Parliament (EP) and the member states (MS) ministry council. The EP passed a slightly modified version of the legal proposal in February 2024, but the member states have so far failed to reach a qualified majority in favour of the proposal. One of the hurdles has been that some member states would like to include wording on patents and IP rights in the NGT legislation.

During the Polish presidency, which started in January 2025, several compromise texts have been circulated and as of now the legal proposal from the member states will include requirements that mandate developers of NGT crops to disclose information on any patented traits in a NGT variety. If the member states manage to reach a qualified majority on the Polish compromise proposal the NGT legislation will be moved into a new phase where the three versions of the legal proposal will be negotiated into one coherent text by the EP, the EC and the member states.

Additional updates from Anna:

- [Consumer study on GE crops from Sweden 2021](#)
- Fascination of Plants Day 2024

A total of [640 events](#) were organized worldwide, including five in Sweden. One of them, *Flower Power!* at Lund's Botanical Garden, could be highlighted as a "success story" for EPSO. Anna will gather details and report back to Carin.

- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

There is a need for more competitive proposals in life and plant sciences, as funding is allocated based on the number of applications. The declining trend in submissions has led to budget [reductions over the years](#). It was raised that the format of the current MSCA leads to significant financial burden on the host institutes, making them in practice hard to support.

- Plant Factories Working Group (formerly Molecular Farming)

[The working group has been relaunched](#). EPSO member organizations are invited to confirm 1–3 experts to participate.

- EPSO TTT Seminar Series (*Third Thursday at Three*)

March: *A barley pantranscriptome*; Speakers: Miriam Schreiber (Hutton, UK), Morten Egevang Jørgensen (Carlsberg, Denmark), Vanda Marosi (Helmholtz Munich)

April: *Alignment of plant science with Soil Missions*

- Upcoming EPSO General Assembly (June 16–18, Ljubljana)

The SLU-LU-UU cluster will be represented by Jens Sundström and potentially Anna.

7. Financial status update, Andreas Fredlund, Anna Maňourová

The remaining amount on the LU side is 39,915 SEK, while at SLU, it is 183,000 SEK. This brings the total available budget for 2025 to approximately 220,000 SEK. The Steering Committee should consider how to spend this budget most productively in the coming year or so. Organising PLantLink Day 2025 is a priority. Other options were contributing to sending a PL board member to attend the EPSO general meeting later in the year.

8. Updates on SLU and Sparbanken Skåne's knowledge centre for sustainable food production, *Håkan Schroeder*

The newly appointed leader, Annie Drottberger, will officially start her role on April 1st. Anna has been in contact with her and will continue the dialogue once the new leader is appointed. Annie might also participate in the upcoming Steering Committee meeting.

The centre is structured around several work packages, with the PhD students' school already up and running, supported by approximately 1 million SEK. Two conferences are planned over the next five years, with the first scheduled for 2026. PlantLink could take an active role as a facilitator.

Lund University (LU) remains an important partner for SLU and the centre. Digitalisation and new technologies will be central themes for the centre, but also competence development and lifelong learning.

PlantLink will maintain its engagement with the centre and keep exploring opportunities for collaboration. PlantLink could support some of the networking and newsletter activities for the centre. In return, it would be beneficial if the centre provides financial support, for example, to the PL's coordinator, ensuring that both benefit from a centralised effort.

9. Update on PlantLink's future funding options, *Olivier Van Aken, Anders Carlsson*

Anders Carlsson explained an idea building on pre-pandemic discussions from 2019, about establishing a broader cross-regional network, engaging the Novo Nordisk Foundation and various Swedish funding bodies.

Currently, much of the foundation's funding is invitation-based, with a strong emphasis on innovative ideas and mission-driven impact. A key focus is translating research from the lab to the field and fostering collaboration between academia and industry. One example is Ramesh Vetukuri's work on RNA sprays. Addressing fundamental scientific challenges, and bridging knowledge gaps in technology and innovation might be the key.

The foundation's preference is to co-develop ideas and be part of the process rather than solely providing funding. It is recommended to aim for larger and more ambitious projects!

Balancing the number of project partners is key to keeping the team focused; starting with a mapping of expertise at SLU and LU can help identify strategic collaborators. Lantmännen has also expressed interest in potential partnerships. The application process is relatively straightforward, focusing on a strong idea and budget. Researchers from Rothamsted Science institute (UK) could be interesting international partners to work with.

PlantLink could organise for a workshop as a first step to generate application ideas and strategic opportunities.

10. PL Board members during 2025, *Olivier Van Aken*

Ida Lager from the Department of Plant Breeding, SLU, has been confirmed as Mariette's replacement. A heartfelt thank you to Mariette for her outstanding and long-standing contributions! Carin Jarl-Sunesson, Lund Botanical Garden, will be joining the Committee, with Allison as a potential future successor.

11. PlantLink Day, *Olivier van Aken*

The upcoming PlantLink Day will focus on bridging the gap between basic and applied science, highlighting translation, key learnings from both fields, and practical implementation. Potential topics include greenhouse technology, the energy crisis, and technological advancements in agriculture. Moving from basic research to technology and application.

Discussions will cover areas such as phenotyping and engineering, with contributions from the LTH group, Lukáš Spíchal (UPOL), and Christer Löfstedt. Also engaging farmers and agricultural advisors.

PlantLink Day will be scheduled for the first week of December. A larger venue might be needed – the Committee should explore possibilities both in Lund and at SLU, not too expensive and also not too large so that the venue still feels full. PlantLink Day will remain a half-day session, with the possibility of an additional workshop either on the same day or as a separate event.

11. Any other business;

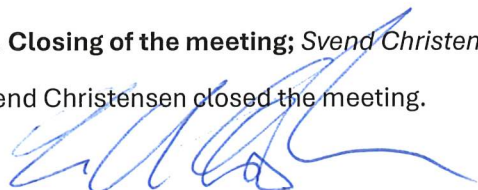
The upcoming newsletter will be released in mid-May. Anna encourages all Committee members to contribute by sharing relevant updates and news!

11. Next meeting; *Svend Christensen*

The next meeting is scheduled for May 19, from 12:00 to 16:00 at Lund University. The exact location will be confirmed later.

16. Closing of the meeting; *Svend Christensen*

Svend Christensen closed the meeting.



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