



## Global Plant Council Member Update February 2015

Dear Global Plant Council Members,

I would like to wish you all a belated happy New Year; the Global Plant Council (GPC) hopes that 2015 is a productive and successful year for its member organizations.

Since our Annual Meeting in London in October 2014 the GPC has been working hard to progress its initiatives and work towards implementing the 2014–2015 action plan. A summary of recent activities is provided below.

### **GPC Finance and Funding**

During 2013 and 2014 the GPC was able to increase its income from membership fees, member organization donations and external support. However, finding a long-term, stable funding source for the GPC continues to be a difficult and arduous task. I am therefore very glad to be able to report two achievements to you.

The first of these is £25,000 GBP (~\$37,500 USD) from the Society for Experimental Biology (SEB) to kick-start the creation of the Plant Knowledge Hub. The Plant Knowledge Hub is an online portal that will provide our member organizations and plant researchers across the world with information, news, funding opportunities, and education, teaching and outreach resources all in one place. Such a central resource was identified as one of our highest priorities at the Annual Meeting. We would therefore like to thank the SEB for their generous support in helping the GPC to get this project off the ground. However, to fully implement the Plant Knowledge Hub, the GPC must now raise another \$500,000 USD over the next three years.

From the start of this month Lisa Martin will be joining the GPC on a part-time basis as the GPC Outreach & Communications Manager. A major part of Lisa's role will be to identify and curate content for the Plant Knowledge Hub. I am sure you will all be hearing from Lisa in due course as she requests information and support from GPC member organizations.

The Plant Knowledge Hub will be built upon a new digital plant community platform that is currently being constructed by the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB). In the months ahead, we are looking forward to collaborating closely with the ASPB team as we lay the foundations for the Plant Knowledge Hub, and we would like to thank the ASPB for their essential in-kind support.

The Plant Knowledge Hub is literally just 'emerging' – to help it continue to grow and become populated with information and resources will require additional funds as explained above. We are therefore actively seeking further investment from

foundations and philanthropic organizations, as well as other national and international funding organizations if possible. We would therefore welcome support from GPC member organizations, either financial or in-kind contributions such as logistical help, to help fully realize the potential of the Plant Knowledge Hub.

The second piece of good news is that funding for the GPC administrative office and Executive Director post has been secured until the end of 2015. Although this provides the GPC with a short duration of stability, we cannot be complacent. The GPC is still under great pressure to raise funds for supporting and expanding its day-to-day activities and running costs to best serve our member organizations. This also requires support from our member organizations. One way you can help us is by promoting our new donation opportunity: as discussed and agreed at the Annual Meeting, GPC has now established an online donation process. If you have not already seen it please visit <http://globalplantcouncil.org/donate>. All donations are very welcome no matter how small or large! Obviously, a web link does not generate money by itself and we would therefore ask all GPC members to actively advertise and promote this opportunity as widely as possible.

## **GPC Initiatives**

### Diversity Seek

The official launch of the DivSeek initiative, 'a global partnership to harness genetic resources for food security', took place on 9<sup>th</sup> January in San Diego, USA. Representatives of the DivSeek founding organizations came together at the partner assembly to officially accept the governing charter of DivSeek and elect Susan McCouch (Cornell University) as their Chair.

The DivSeek Initiative is currently supported by 69 organizations from 30 countries, which have come together to unlock the genetic potential of crop diversity present in gene banks around the world with the goal of accelerating the development of climate-ready, high-yielding and nutritious crops. For a full list of the 69 DivSeek participating organizations visit <http://www.divseek.org/interest/>. Other organizations are very welcome to join DivSeek and should contact [info@divseek.org](mailto:info@divseek.org).

DivSeek is co-ordinated by the Global Plant Council, the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (GGIAR), and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. These organizations have agreed to jointly facilitate this far-reaching global effort. If you would like to learn more about DivSeek please visit <http://www.divseek.org/>.

### Digital Seed Bank

The Digital Seed Bank (DSB) is a foundational project of the DivSeek Initiative. DSB aims to capture the genotypic, molecular, biochemical and metabolic information associated with crop diversity and link it with observable phenotypic information for crops in their native environments. The goal is to make the information available in a

public database to facilitate the work of scientists and breeders in developing innovative breeding strategies for improved crops as mentioned above.

Further to his explanation at the last General Meeting, in 2014 Wilhelm Gruissem brought together a team of leading scientists from around the world to submit an invited proposal from the Templeton Foundation to initiate the DSB. Unfortunately, after much work, and despite finding the project worthy, the Templeton Foundation decided not to support the DSB. This was, in part, because some reviewers criticized that intellectual property issues associated with germplasm had not been fully considered, and nor had the long-term funding model for a database like the DSB. Undaunted by this initial disappointment, the founding DSB team has agreed to maintain their support for the DSB because they are convinced these critical issues can be addressed. They continue to seek support from other foundations and philanthropic organizations. Again, we ask you to support this initiative by informing your national funding organizations, or contacts you may have with philanthropic organizations about DSB, DivSeek, and the work of the GPC.

### Stress Resilience

In order to feed an expanding global population in the next decades, it is crucial to increase food production in a sustainable manner, and to improve crop resilience to the stresses generated by reduced inputs, emerging pathogens, and changes in climate. Prof Jim Beynon and Prof Vicky Buchanan-Wollaston are leading this initiative.

There are a number of initiatives focused on crop adaptation and resilience across the world. However, these efforts operate at different scales, with varying degrees of integration and communication. International co-operation and global co-ordination is therefore needed to minimize the duplication of effort, and to maximize impact from investments.

The GPC Stress Resilience Initiative aims to identify and catalog projects that are presently underway, to clarify the global effort, and to identify gaps in current approaches. This will enable the GPC to shape a consensus view and promote the strategies required for developing crop species with improved resilience to stress.

To kick-start the initiative, a short survey was sent out to all GPC members at the end of 2014 to gain a better understanding of work currently ongoing in this area around the world. We received more than 200 surveys packed full of useful information, which will initially be used to identify key projects and initiatives to speak about at the GPC Stress Resilience Forum, to be held at the Iguaçu Falls (Brazil/Argentina border) on 23–24 October. With the consent of those that provided it, and with the aim to promote collaboration and knowledge exchange, we also plan to make the information from the surveys available to the plant science community so that researchers can see what research is being undertaken across the globe.

## **Promoting GPC**

### New Media Fellowship

In January 2015 the GPC launched its 'New Media Fellowship', under which PhD students and postdoctoral scholars with a background in plant science will work with the GPC team for one year to expand its reach via the use of social media and other online outlets. The first fellowship carries a small stipend of \$3,500 USD and will be open for applications until the 27<sup>th</sup> February. A second funded fellowship will be advertised later.

We ask all member organizations to advertise this opportunity to their individual members, and to encourage strong candidates who meet the fellowship criteria to apply. A PDF of the Fellowship advert is available for download at:

<http://bit.ly/1zw2om3>.

### Member Organizations Meetings and Conferences

As discussed and agreed at the Annual Meeting the GPC would like to find ways to promote its activities at the various meetings and conferences run by its member organizations. This will help us to increase awareness of the GPC and provides an excellent opportunity to interact with member organizations and obtain feedback from individual researchers.

For example, in 2014 we organised a scientific session at the EPSO/FESPB meeting, had an exhibition booth at the EPSO/FESPB and ASPB meetings, and we were invited to give one of the keynote talks at the joint meeting of the Argentinean and Brazilian Societies of Plant Physiology.

We are currently planning our activities for 2015 and would like to hear your suggestions on how the GPC could be promoted during your annual meeting/conference. Please email Ruth ([ruth@globalplantcouncil.org](mailto:ruth@globalplantcouncil.org)) with your ideas by the 27 February.

### **GPC Annual Meeting**

The 2015 meeting of the GPC will take at Iguaçu Falls (Brazil/Argentina border) 29–30 October after the IPMB Meeting.

Kind Regards

Wilhelm Gruissem  
GPC Chair and Acting President

Ruth Bastow  
GPC Executive Director