

Celebrating & promoting progress towards gender equality in crop science

Report from Monogram 2022

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Meeting summary

The 2022 Monogram UK Cereal and Grasses Community meeting was held at The University of Leeds, hosted by Dr Laura Dixon. The annual meeting was the first in-person event post-pandemic and have 130 in-person delegates, with an equal gender distribution (Figure 1).

Each of the ten meeting sessions were co-chaired by representatives of the Monogram community. The session chairs were invited by the organizing committee, with a close to even gender distribution (Figure 2a). The session chairs also reflected a range of career stages from Principal Investigator (PI) through PhD student, post-doc, senior scientist, and industry representatives.

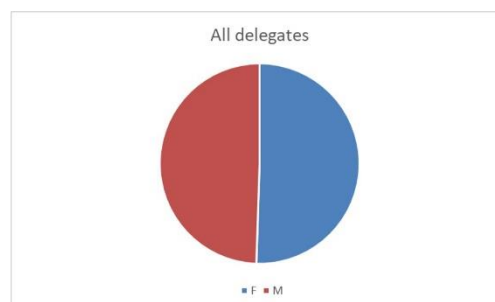


Figure 1. Gender distribution of Monogram 2022 attendees (n=130)

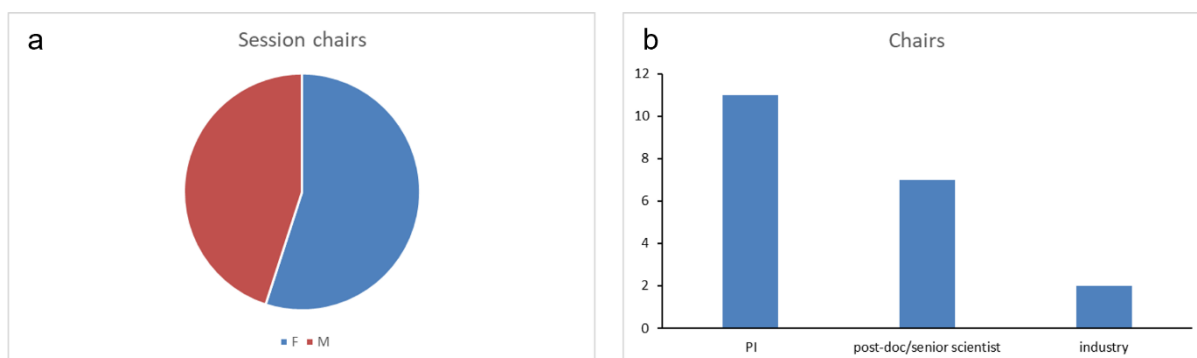


Figure 2. (a) Gender distribution of invited session chairs; and (b) career stage distribution (n=20)

The session chairs were responsible for inviting one speaker to present an invited talk in their session (except for the award winners' session) and the remaining three presenters in each session were selected by the chairs from the submitted abstracts.

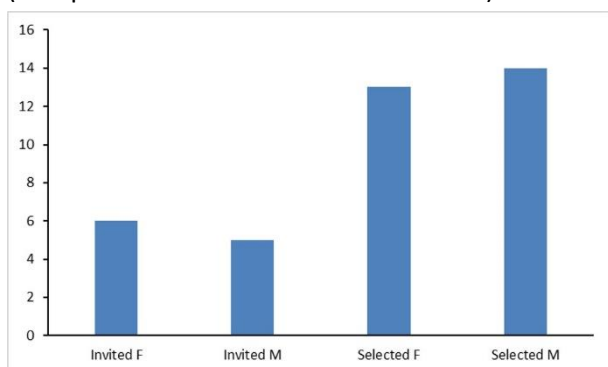


Figure 3. Gender distribution of invited and selected speakers (n=37)

Overall, the meeting achieved both equal gender representation for attendees, session chairs and speakers (both invited and selected). In addition to the main program, we hosted a Women in Crop Science coffee session with the aim of building better connections and networking opportunities for women in the community.

Women in Crop Science session

During the session we posed three questions to the participants and encouraged them to provide suggestions and discuss ideas. The questions were: (1) Who is your role model?; (2) Any suggestions for a Women in Crop Sciences network?; (3) How can Monogram be more inclusive? A summary of the responses is given below.

Who is your role model? Only one prominent individual was explicitly named (Nobel Prize winning cytogeneticist Prof. Barbara McClintock) but participants agreed on character types and values that they aspire to. This includes anyone able to gain confidence and believe in herself in a man's world, women in the CGIAR system and women managing research teams. Participants were also inspired by women who can balance work and personal life and who work on crops and creates linkages to food security and influencing policy changes.

Any suggestions for a Women in Crop Sciences network? Participants had numerous practical suggestions for building a network, including creating an informal Slack (or similar) group and/or an online community forum for raising questions and sharing information (e.g. who received fellowships and are they willing to give guidance to others) and advice. In addition, they encouraged wider sharing of job opportunities and current vacancies to encourage more women to apply. We also discussed peer support for people with caring responsibilities, having access to a pool of mentor across career levels and a mentoring programme from academics to industry. Finally, the group discussed the potential for creating a directory of women in crop sciences to ensure the community has ready access to a database of female expertise and can use this for identifying speakers for meetings and panels. Several such community resources exist e.g. in the soil science community (<https://franciskadevries.wordpress.com/women-in-soil-science/>).

How can Monogram be more inclusive? In general, participants were in favour of opportunities to promote interactions during the conference and to continue to give opportunities to early career scientists to present. Maintaining the virtual attendance option was also seen as important for making the meeting accessible to those with caring responsibilities and/or those on parental leave who want to be able to access content either remotely or once they return to work. It was noted that meeting recordings need to have working subtitles to ensure accessibility. International attendance was also discussed with a recommendation to invite scientists from the Global South and to have future hybrid sessions to allow greater international participation. This could be coupled with arranging activities outside (and in addition to) the conference, for example visits to labs to facilitate a longer visit for those attending in-person from further afield. Overall, the participants felt it would be useful to see the gender statistics from the meeting across presenters and session chairs. In future organizers should also consider how to further reflect other diversity in the community, both in terms of human diversity, crop species and diversity of scientific approaches to crop science.

Summary

The Monogram community celebrates, respects and fosters diversity in the UK Cereal and Grasses community. The gender statistics from Monogram 2022 indicate that the meeting has achieved equal distribution of attendees, session chairs and presenters. The Women in Crop Science session identified further opportunities for promoting and developing the visibility of women as role models in the crop science community, in building stronger networks and for ensuring greater inclusion in future. As a first step we aim to create a directory of female crop scientists which is open to all and will be hosted on the Monogram website. To join the directory send an email with your name and area of work to WomenInCropScience@gmail.com