



Strategy Meeting – Report

Event Executive Committee Meeting on EGF Strategy 2021
Organiser European Grassland Federation
Place/date/time Radisson Blu Royal Garden Hotel, Kjøpmannsgaten 73, N-7010 Trondheim (Norway);
Sunday, 4 September 2016, 15:00-19:00, Room Brattøra

Invited persons Members: *Nesheim* (Norway), President
Marshall (United Kingdom), Past President
Reidy (Switzerland), for Central Europe
Peeters (Belgium), for Western Europe
Seppänen (Finland), for Northern Europe
Loit (Estonia), for North Eastern Europe
Kirilov (Bulgaria), for Eastern Europe
Alibegovic-Grbic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), for South Eastern Europe
Porqueddu (Italy), for Southern Europe

Co-opted Members: *Lombnæs* (Norway), Organising Committee EGF 2016
O'Mara and *O'Donovan* (Ireland), Organising Committee EGF 2018

Honorary Life Presidents: *Blagovechensky* (Russia), *Wilkins* (United Kingdom),
Nösberger (Switzerland), *Prins* (The Netherlands) and *Parente* (Italy)

Federation Secretary: *Kessler* (Switzerland)

Agenda / matters arising

(Annexe)

1	Opening		Nesheim
2	Approval of the agenda		Nesheim
3	EGF Strategy 2021 – Process so far (survey, questionnaire, answers)	1, 2	Kessler
4	Future role of EGF – Vision, motto/slogan and mission of EGF	1, 2	all
5	Offers of EGF	1, 2	all
6	How to maintain/increase attractiveness?	1, 2	all
7	Grassland Science in Europe – Future significance, way of publication	1, 2	all
8	Rhythm of EGF conferences	1, 2	all
9	EGF website	1, 2	all
10	Other electronic communication and networking	1, 2	all
11	Operation of EGF – Low-budget vs. more professional	1, 2	all
12	EGF Strategy 2021 – next steps	1, 2, 3	all
13	EGF Summer School on Grassland - what should we do next?	4	all
14	Closing		Nesheim

ITEM 1

OPENING

The EGF President *Nesheim* (Norway) opens the meeting at 15h00.

The *Federation Secretary* got excuses from *Alibegovic-Grbic* (Bosnia-Herzegovina), *O'Mara* (Ireland), *Prins* (The Netherlands), and *Parente* (Italy). *O'Mara* is substituted by *Kennedy* (Ireland). *Loit* (Estonia) and *Blagoveschensky* (Russia) are not present in Trondheim. *Lombnæs* (Norway) is excused for organisational reasons.

There are 12 persons taking part in this strategy meeting.

ITEM 2

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The Agenda is approved without changes.

- Item 4-11 correspond with the questions in the questionnaire used for the survey.
- Item 12 aims at summarizing the next steps.
- Item 13 concerns the EGF summer school on grassland topics and addresses “what to do next?”

The meeting should end at 19h00.

ITEM 3

EGF STRATEGY 2021 – PROCESS SO FAR (SURVEY, QUESTIONNAIRE, ANSWERS)

- During the regular meetings of the *Executive Committee* time is always lacking for extended discussions and there is hardly any time available for strategic discussions.
- For this reason, it was decided last year to hold a strategic meeting here in Trondheim.
- In preparation, the *Federation Secretary* was given the mandate to perform a survey to assess the current and future needs of the stakeholders to the EGF.
- A questionnaire with 12 questions was created and sent to the member countries and the members of the *Scientific Advisory Board* and the *Executive Committee*.
- The return rate of the questionnaires varied widely from 7 % (*Scientific Advisory Board*) to 70 % (member countries).
- The *Federation Secretary* compiled the responses and comments of the representatives of the EGF member countries in a Word document which was sent to the *Executive Committee* and which shall serve as a source of inspiration for the today's discussions.

ITEM 4

FUTURE ROLE OF EGF – VISION, MOTTO/SLOGAN AND MISSION OF EGF

Question 1: Do the above-mentioned vision, motto / slogan and mission (as described on page 2) correspond with your vision for a modern, contemporary EGF?

Yes: 19/20

No: 1/20

What needs to be changed to match your idea?

Examples of selected answers:

- Improve interaction between national grassland organisations – a brief description of these organisations on the EGF homepage could be provided
- Replace “on all aspects of grassland production and utilization in Europe” by “on all aspects of grasslands in Europe”
- More emphasis is to be placed on interdisciplinarity, which is an important aspect of EGF

Conclusion: There is potential for minor adjustments. These can be done by the *Federation Secretary* on his own.

ITEM 5

OFFERS OF EGF

Question 2: Do the elements offered by EGF meet your needs?

Yes: 19/21

No: 2/21

What are you particularly missing?

Examples of selected answers:

- Implementation of a citation export tool for the EGF-proceedings on the EGF website; this will support (young) scientists to build up their electronic libraries (e.g. endnote or others)
- A better indexing of EGF proceedings
- Information about research-project activities concerning grasslands
- Policy influence and knowledge transfer
- Regular Newsletter

Conclusion:

- The citation expert tool is a pure technical problem which the Federation Secretary will try to realise if possible.
- Some of the proposals brought forward by member countries in the survey contradict earlier decisions by the *Executive Committee*.

ITEM 6

HOW TO MAINTAIN/INCREASE ATTRACTIVENESS?

Question 3: What should EGF consider for maintaining / increasing the attractiveness of the annual/biannual events?

Examples of selected answers:

- The annual/biannual events are still attractive!
- More young(er) colleagues giving invited papers/presentations
- Inviting technology providers and experts from outside Europe
- Take targeted action to attract scientists with a more specific, yet grassland related expertise
- Reduce registration fee
- Actively stimulate people to initiate working groups on different and new topics
- ISI indexed proceedings
- Section for farmers and involvement of policy makers

Conclusion:

Some of the points mentioned above are already realised or could/should be realised anyway. Some cannot, until the Executive Committee decides or changes the EGF policy correspondingly.

Proposals of the Executive Committee after discussion in two groups of five

- Coordination with partners, more flexibility on time axis
- Adapting format of conferences
- Links / Inter-disciplines
- Younger Scientists
- Broaden range of topics – Possibility at Symposia → Examples: biodiversity, knowledge transfer

Conclusion: These proposals could all be implemented. They require the abandonment of the fixed biennium and a new process for the recruitment of host countries. The *Executive Committee* would have to decide beforehand about these changes.

→ The discussion must be continued on this subject.

ITEM 7

GRASSLAND SCIENCE IN EUROPE – FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE, WAY OF PUBLICATION

Question 4: What is your personal opinion about the future significance of EGF's conference proceedings "Grassland Science in Europe"?

Examples of selected answers:

- The proceedings are very positive; without, a lot of information would not be available because not all this information is published in A1 articles; furthermore a decrease in exchange between East and West and North and South of EU would take place
- I like the 'book' for two reasons: (I) It provides a nice archive of our research over the years including that type of research that might not appear in 'proper' journals later on. (II) It helps me to increase the efficiency of information on the conference
- The book will remain important for two reasons: 1) It is a nice opportunity to share and discuss preliminary results and 2) it is an opportunity to publish results
- We should keep its present form by all means
- Too much effort goes into preparing the proceedings in the light of the fact that they are not searchable on the internet in any of the databases available for such purposes
- Sending an email newflash highlighting some of the papers would be useful; using twitter in a similar manner to journal of dairy science would also raise the profile
- It would be nice if the papers printed in the proceedings could have been included in international databases
- A lot of work with very little impact and the inherent danger of pre-publication

Conclusion: "Grassland Science in Europe" – The general consent is a predominantly clear. The *Executive Committee* had good reasons for the current practice. Perhaps they have to be questioned again by the *Executive Committee*.

Proposals of the Executive Committee after discussion in two groups

- Quality of papers decreasing
- Students not clear – can data in proceedings be published in journal after?
- 1-page summary for proceedings including keywords, email
- Unprotected USB proceedings

- Should be on website
- Special Issue for invited papers in GFS / Grassland Science in Europe
- Disproportion effort in Grassland Science in Europe, review process inconsistent
 - Offered papers: 1-page papers (better discipline/precision)
 - Invited papers: Special edition of journals – GFS or another
- Length of paper (3 pages) questionable → <3
- Keep paper copy while requirement is there
- Hardcopy → electronic???? Relates to size of papers
- Papers searchable on EGF website

Conclusion: The discussion in the *Executive Committee* mainly focused on the length of the offered papers published in Grassland Science in Europe. It was said, that the quality of the proceedings had been declining in recent years. And it was said that the required effort to ensure a satisfactory quality would be disproportionately high. Therefore the length of the papers might as well be reduced to one page.

→ The Executive Committee will have to carefully evaluate this question again.

Question 5: Should the proceedings still be published as a book or only electronically?

As a book, because ...: 2/21

- I like the book for two reasons (see above)

Both electronically and as a book, because ...: 15/21 (2 counties above also replied here)

- Some people love to work with a hard copy but like to use electronic options as well
- Electronically is the future but I like a (nice) printed version for reading
- Studying a book will never go out of fashion, and interest in electronic version is increasing
- I think the book will not last for another 10 years looking at the trends in the world...
- The world is moving towards electronic media; and cost saving

Electronically only, because ...: 10/21 (4 of 15 counties above also replied here)

- Better for environment: less paper needed ...
- Cheaper and easier to manage
- I always open the pdf and never the book
- If I badly need any particular article as a hard copy I can print it out myself

Conclusion: For the time being, the EGF will probably not be able to do without the book. During the next few years, a possibility to order the book on the occasion of registration, as practiced in Norway, could be a good solution.

ITEM 8

RHYTHM OF EGF CONFERENCES

Question 6: Should EGF hold the current rhythm of events (General Meetings every two years and Symposia in between)?

Yes, because ...: 20/21

- It provides good tradition and continuity; but it will be more and more difficult to find engaged colleagues who are willing to organize such events in the future
- We should consider a system with General Meetings every third year with symposia in years in between; no change as long as organizers for General Meetings every two years can be found

- General meetings every 2 years are necessary for continuation of contacts between grassland people all over EU; symposia hopefully can continue to take place every 2 years
- This is the best way to keep up with the development of our science
- This has worked fine and there is no need to change this.
- If we see a trend for more specialized conferences/symposia, this could be an argument for less frequently GMs

No, I would prefer ...: 2/21

- Bi-annual is possibly more affordable

Conclusion: The current conference rhythm with the two conference types General Meeting and Symposium seems to meet the needs. There are no reasons to change the concept.

ITEM 9 **EGF WEBSITE**

Question 7: **EGF maintains a website (www.europeangrassland.org), which is used both internally and externally as an information platform. How satisfied are you with the information provided?**

Satisfied, because ...: 20/21

- It provides actual information but also offers proceedings/information from previous events
- The information I need is generally available; important is a good archive of proceedings, protocols, reports, publications
- I always find the information I need
- The website is a rich resource of information, even if it could be more interactive.
- For me, the site really works due to the WG Grazing page
- You can always offer more, but things need to be maintained; so it is well balanced

Dissatisfied, because ...: 3/21

- Could be updated more frequently
- Is not interactive! Does not present summary data on European level
- It could be updated and supplied with fresh news more often; now the information is limited to the yearly events and the proceedings published; so the website is to be visited only twice or thrice a year

My constructive suggestions for improvement:

- Space for contributions from the national associations
- More inputs/information from member countries → news, local grassland meetings, ...
- Links to national grassland associations/societies would be useful
- Have a link to the latest conference/symposia proceedings
- Allow a search facility for the proceedings so that a visitor could put in their key word/words and all the proceedings would be searched for related papers
- Offer open online discussions on publications or burning issues
- Send e-mails when there is some new information available; think about the possibility of frequent information letters
- Provide some data on grasslands in Europe
- Offer to individuals to subscribe to newsletters (at least once each year)

Conclusion: Web sites can for sure offer infinitely much. It is well to weigh what is necessary and useful and what is merely beautiful and nice to have. Therefore, it is important to decide what the website is for. One could always make a lot more.

- ➔ The EGF website needs to be updated in shorter terms. It is important to think about the introduction of a newsletters and information e-mails.
- ➔ The website has to be modernised and, above all, to be designed to allow responsiveness.

ITEM 10

OTHER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

Question 8: Is there a need for more electronic communication and networking?

No, because ...: 5/21

- The homepage contains sufficient information
- We get flooded with electronic stuff via computer, mobile etc.; successful networking is a grass root process and there is no need for formal management
- Information about upcoming events has been excellent in recent years
- It is better to visit an updated website than receiving a lot of e-mails!

Yes, because ...: 9/21

- There is one year between the EGF-events and many months without any communication
- To increase the profile and encourage more researchers/scientists and industry people to attend meetings; it would also show that the EGF is a modern organisation
- Our habits are changing, electronic communication and networking are becoming more frequent and usual even in professional activity
- For young people it offers a possibilities to meet people working in a similar field
- E-mail newsletters are a good way to communicate what is updated on the website and also interesting articles and so on

Which way should this be done (e-mail newflash, social media)? What do you suggest?

- Newsletters could be very helpful or e-mails reminding members to have a look at the updated homepage
- Email newflashes when there is a new volume of Grass and Forage Science published, when details of a future conference are announced, even if it is 2 or 3 years down the line
- Social media is useful – LinkedIn would be a good start and then twitter (Journal of Dairy Science use twitter very well to promote articles – maybe EGF could do something similar, and also do a live twitter feed during conferences/symposia)
- The animation of a network through social media (e.g. promoting the LinkedIn group) should be intensified
- Information via social media is good, but less often read than a (maybe even personalised) newsletter
- Electronic discussion groups may also be stimulated and/or facilitated

Conclusion: Although the EGF website is the primary source of information, the EGF could increasingly focus on social media and build up presence and activity there.

- ➔ The *Federation Secretary* will devote himself to these elements and push them forward. External support would most likely be needed.

Proposals of the Executive Committee after discussion in two groups

- Website > improve > More technical info > Central for activities > Forum / Twitter / Webinar
- Twitter feeds
- Newsletters
- Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter
- Technical info on website

Conclusion: The recommendations are consistent with those of the representatives of the member countries (see above).

ITEM 11

OPERATION OF EGF – LOW-BUDGET VS. MORE PROFESSIONAL

Question 9: EGF is a non-profit, low-budget organisation relying on volunteers. Should EGF be operated more professional and supported with more resources?

No, because ...: 13/21

- EGF cannot operate much more professional because no money is available now and in the near future; I am happy that there are still enough volunteers to organise these meetings; no volunteers = no meetings or meetings with very high registration costs and much less participants from around EU
- Well, you might wish, but where should the money come from? The performance of the voluntary structure is quite good
- EGF does a good job as it is
- I do not see how more resources would lead to better results; the volunteers are the strength of EGF; volunteers are usually highly motivated! At the moment, I think EGF is doing a very good job!
- I am satisfied with the present operation (thanks to our ambitious *Federation Secretary*)
- It should stay the community thing it is at the moment

Yes, because ...: 7/21

- For sure this would be good but budgets get shortened everywhere in Europe
- Surely, EGF does not lack professionalism, but a greater availability of means would improve its impact and effectiveness (by presence in social media and networking)
- If EGF wants to do more it requires an employed secretariat; but this depends on raising funds to employ people, which can be problematic

If so, how should EGF function? Is there an exemplary other organisation?

- I am sorry, but I do not have examples of organizations to propose
- IFOAM – they do lobbying in Brussels and have a strong involvement of farmers and researchers
- Perhaps the national members could be more ‘used’ in specific tasks, e.g. policy making
- The structure would probably be a (possibly part-time) Chief executive, with administrative assistance

What should be the objectives to be achieved?

- EGF should continue to disseminate knowledge, increase the awareness of the role and the importance of grasslands in the agricultural production system, and help to exercise more pressure towards the decision makers
- There’s a wider question of what EGF wants to do. If it is primarily a scientific organisation, it is possibly OK as it is. The publications are wide-ranging and well-respected. If it wishes to engage a broader audience, it needs to have publications and events which bring in commercial and farming audiences. But this is a difficult balance, as BGS is finding!

How should a possible much larger effort be funded in your opinion?

- EU-funding (Horizon 2020, Interreg, rural development programs etc.)
- It would require either membership fees or sponsorship

Conclusion: There is basically broad agreement with the current business form. Respondents show respect for the financial need as a result of professionalization which would indeed be very expensive.

Proposals of the Executive Committee after discussion in two groups

1) More professionalism → employees → need for financial means → membership fee

- Replace regional representatives by active members of the Executive Committee
- Finding means in large institutes
- EU research projects could pay for maintenance of the website
- Group of young scientists could prepare modification of the statutes
- Leaders of working groups could replace regional representatives
- Special section for young researchers represented in the *Executive Committee*
- Changes within 2 years
- Unformal structure --> 'Clarity' = NGO with a legal personality
- Different levels of membership fees: students, ...

2) Status Quo – good

- Direct email for communication
- Additional activities = more resources
- Executive Committee
 - President – leave as it is
 - Regions – structure of national contact people is not clear / improve
 - Revisit federal structure
- a) Spread volunteer load
 - conference organizer responsible for media; active from finish of previous conference
- b) Higher per head fee (10-20 EUR / Increase federal subscription fee
 - Requirement Executive Committee → Need for geographic spread
 - Membership - Institutional membership powered (?) over individual membership
 - Mandating group → Constitution → Options → Priorities
 - Entice younger people but ensure there is still a lot of experienced people also

Conclusion: In contrast to the member countries, the members of the *Executive Committee* make more radical suggestions for changes. These are to be examined and further discussed also with regard to feasibility.

- ➔ In the short term the EGF can/should work according to the currently functioning system. Adjustments for the future can be made carefully considered and without time pressure. For this purpose, additional persons from the EGF family should be consulted.

ITEM 12

EGF STRATEGY 2021 – NEXT STEPS

Additional information about the survey

Question 10: What I also wanted to say

- “Country meetings” representing all nations (one person of each nation) should be organised during the conferences; such a meeting could provide a broad variation of wishes, desires and a representative opinion trend as well
- Local committees rely on sponsors, but sometimes the commercial companies are too visible; maybe there should be a ‘code’ in terms of the input of commercial sponsors to events
- To thank you cordially for the possibility to visit EGF meetings; thank you for all your efforts!
- Congratulations on the excellent job carried out by EGF

Age structure and experience (participations in EGF conferences)

Age structure of survey participants	< 40 years	40-60 years	> 60 years
	3 persons	15 persons	3 persons
Experience with EGF events	1-3 events	4-6 events	7-10 events
	7 persons	5 persons	9 persons

Summary

In the first place, the survey confirms and supports the current system. A large majority of respondents are satisfied with the EGF as regards the objectives, the range of services and the form of organization.

- ➔ Individual suggestions for improvement can/must be considered. Most of them are technical details, which the *Federation Secretary* has to implement in his own competence.

In contrast to the respondents, the *Executive Committee* has questioned some principle aspects in a more fundamental way:

- The paper review process for the proceedings and related the length (number of pages) of offered papers
- The organisational form of the EGF: management by honorary officials or by professionals?

Proceedings

As regards paper length, the *Executive Committee* made a decision at the meeting of 6 September (see minutes). According to a spontaneous opinion poll by the *Federation Secretary* on the occasion of the EGF Business Meeting in Trondheim, Norway, this decision clearly contradicts to the opinion of the majority of the present participants in EGF2016. Furthermore, paper length must not be discussed in isolation from other aspects of the proceedings. It is finally about the importance of the EGF Proceedings, about their quality and the question of continuation of the successful series Grassland Science in Europe.

- ➔ The *Federation Secretary* will prepare a return request for this point to be discussed in the meeting of the *Executive Committee* in Sardinia 2017.

Organisation

What would be the optimal organisation and structure of EGF to best meet the current and future demands? The organizational form will be questioned and further developed. The following aspects have to be clarified:

- Analysis of the current organisation and management with regard to the purpose and the objectives according to the Constitution
 - Definition of any new strategy, goals, timelines
 - Consequences for the organisation and the management
 - How to cover the associated financial expenses
 - New location of EGF business domicile in Europe
 - EGF bodies and their composition (regional representations vs. particular tasks (e.g. communication, research, agricultural policy, ...))
 - Responsibilities for the process
 - Persons to involve
- ➔ The discussion on the further development of the EGF organisation is to be continued and the procedure to be defined in Sardinia 2017.

Final remark by the Federation Secretary

The *Executive Committee* held a lively and open discussion on the current and future needs of the stakeholders to the EGF and in the sense of a brainstorming was collecting ideas for the future development of the EGF. Nothing was decided, but the discussion must be taken up again and further deepened in order to allow progress.

ITEM 13

EGF SUMMER SCHOOL ON GRASSLAND - WHAT SHOULD WE DO NEXT?

The *Federation Secretary* consulted the SAB to the “Establishment of an EGF Summer School - next step” on 24-02-2016. He asked the following questions:

- Are you ready to further develop the concept for an EGF Summer School in a core team along with the *Federation Secretary*?
- If so, what should we do next?

The answers to the first question (return rate 57 %; 8/14) were mostly positive and supportive.

Recommendations for further action (from the replies to the second question):

- First/Next step: finding host institution, defining course programme and exploring funding opportunities
 - Pilot the idea with a single summer school at one location → review how that one goes, before planning more
 - Guess one needs to start with a volunteering group of organisers and then go from there
 - I would be happy to contribute in a core team; first thing to do: organise a Skype meeting or a phone conference discussing the ideas; second: decide on a location for a first summer school and then work from there
- ➔ The *Federation Secretary* will continue the work with a core group as recommended.

ITEM 14

CLOSING

The President thanks the *Federation Secretary* for the good preparation and the members of the *Executive Committee* for the participation and the lively discussion with constructive contributions and wishes everyone a good stay in Trondheim.

SUMMARY

ORDERS/TO DO LIST

Subject	Who	Deadline
<u>Strategy 2021</u> : Report on EGF Strategy Meeting of Sunday 4 September 2016 in Trondheim, Norway	<i>Kessler</i>	December 2016
<u>Results of Survey 2016</u> : Publish results on current and future needs (EGF Strategy 2021) on the EGF website	<i>Kessler</i>	May 2017
<u>EGF website</u> : Redesign it to allow responsiveness	<i>Kessler</i>	May 2017
<u>Newsletter</u> : Elaborate a concept for an EGF newsletter	<i>Kessler</i>	June 2018
<u>Social Media</u> : Prepare EGF presence in social media	<i>Kessler</i>	June 2018
<u>EGF Summer School</u> : Continue work with a core group	<i>Kessler</i>	June 2018
<u>EGF Strategy 2021</u> : Plan continuation of the discussion	<i>Kessler</i>	June 2018

Zurich, 11 December 2016

Willy Kessler, Federation Secretary