

Emerging Viruses in Cucurbits Working Group

Inaugural Meeting (Y01Q1) – [Tuesday, April 19, 2022; 10:00 AM – 4:30 PM CT]

REPORT

EVCWG Attendees: Rebecca Melanson, Bill Wintermantel, Tom Turini, Tony Keinath, Sudeep Bag, Scott Adkins, Aviv Dombrovsky, Bright Agindotan, Kishor Bhattarai, Ric Dunkle, Shaker Kousik, Olufemi Alabi, Kai-Shu Ling, Babu Srinivasan, Cecelia McGregor's, Samantha Thomas, Apurba Barman, Kerry Mauck, Gary Vallad

Other Attendees: Alexander Luckew (UGA), Joe LaForest (SIPMC), Tegan Walker (SIPMC), Kayla Watson (SIPMC)

Co-chairs Melanson and Wintermantel welcomed attendees to the inaugural EVCWG meeting. EVCWG members and others in attendance introduced themselves.

Melanson and Wintermantel discussed the evolution of the working group, member expectations, and logistics related to email communication within the working group and grant funding.

Additional EVCWG members not present were mentioned. The group was asked for additional member recommendations.

The originally proposed mission of the EVCWG was reviewed and modified to become: “The mission of the Emerging Viruses in Cucurbits Working group is to improve communication and knowledge about viruses across the cucurbit industry and develop strategies to successfully identify and mitigate virus threats to cucurbit production in the United States.” Sixteen of 18 attendees voted in favor of accepting this modified mission.

The EVCWG will hold quarterly meetings throughout its first year. Today's inaugural meeting was held entirely virtually. All remaining meetings will be hybrid meetings to allow for in-person as well as virtual participation. Meetings are tentatively scheduled for August 2022, October/November 2022, and February 2023. Attempts will be made to hold these in association with other widely-attended conferences by EVCWG members and to meet in various regions of the U.S. Ideas for activities to be included in EVCWG meetings, such as short presentations from invited speakers on hot topics and short regional reports, were discussed and favorable among attendees.

Attendees discussed ideas, format, and content for an EVCWG website. The group was in favor of moving forward with a working group website that would have a more appealing presentation and allow for more user-friendly content. Suggested content for inclusion on the website included the EVCWG mission statement, a membership list, meeting reports, educational resources (e.g. fact sheets in PDF and HTML format, photos), useful links to external resources, and an incidence/virus distribution map. The Southern IPM Center (SIPMC) will manage the EVCWG website during and beyond the funded project period. Suggestions for domain names will be provided for future EVCWG discussion.

The SIPMC will design a logo for the EVCWG. Meeting attendees discussed and provided design ideas for the logo. A subcommittee with volunteers from the EVCWG will be formed to work with the SIPMC point of contact to design the logo. The design will be brought forward to the EVCWG for approval. The logo will be included on the EVCWG website, EVCWG-produced educational resources, and presentations discussing EVCWG initiatives.

The EVCWG will provide several deliverables in accordance with the funded grant, including a white paper/report on the EVCWG, 10 fact sheets on selected virus topics, and two videos/webcasts on selected virus topics.

- The white paper/report will focus on the EVCWG – who it is, its’ mission, and identified priorities.
- Fact sheets will be produced and printed by Mississippi State University Extension. Fact sheet content as well as authorship, reviews, and editing were discussed. Fact sheet topics will be based on prioritized virus threats. Fact sheets will be completed and available electronically by February 28, 2023.
- One webcast/video will be produced by and for the Grow: Plant Health Exchange [Focus on Cucurbits](#) webpage. The other will be created and posted on the SIPMC YouTube Channel. Webcasts/videos will be linked on the EVCWG website. Webcast/video topics will be based on prioritized or “hot topic” virus threats.

EVCWG “marketing” was discussed. One of the goals of the EVCWG is to improve communication on virus threats within the cucurbit industry. As such, it is important that we communicate the formation of the working group and its activities to members of the cucurbit industry. This will be done through various means, including presentations delivered by EVCWG members, to both producer-focused and industry-focused audiences. To this point, presentations discussing the EVCWG have been delivered (formally) at three conferences/meetings: the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) Vegetable, Flower, and Seed Conference (January 28 – February 1, 2022; San Diego, CA), presenter: Wintermantel; the Watermelon Research and Development Group Annual Meeting (February 11-12, 2022; New Orleans, LA), presenters: Wintermantel and Melanson; and the International IPM Symposium (February 28 – March 3, 2022; Denver, CO), presenter: Mauck. A short presentation with slides will be created and made available for use by EVCWG members in their own events. A recorded, computer-generated presentation on the EVCWG will also be created for the EVCWG website. Suggestions for additional conferences/meeting to be held during the project funding period and at which the EVCWG should be represented were recorded and include: the American Society for Horticultural Science Conference (July/August 2022; Chicago, IL), the California Melon Research Board Meeting (January 2023; San Diego, CA.), the American Seed Trade Association Vegetable, Flower, and Seed Conference (January 2023; location TBD), the Southeast Region Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association Conference (January 2023; Savannah, GA), the National Watermelon Association Convention (February 2023; Asheville, NC), the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention (February 2023; location TBD), the Watermelon Research and Development Group Annual Meeting (February 2023; Oklahoma City, OK), other ASTA meetings, the California Seed Association Meeting, and the International Society for Plant Pathology Conference (2023; France). The group also discussed holding webinars/Zoom meetings for this purpose.

Four discussion topics related to emerging viruses in cucurbits were discussed in various venues prior to the formation of the EVCWG:

1. What are the potential risk factors for viruses affecting cucurbits?
2. What regional/local threats exist and how do risks vary by type of production or region? (include international threats, identify experts)
3. What approaches can we take to mitigate threats?
4. What can industry and academia do to coordinate efforts to reduce threats?

The EVCWG will work to address these topics in the next year and will prioritize responses. No additional discussion topics were suggested.

Evaluation is key when determining the success of a project. EVCWG members discussed methods, including online surveys and a pop-up survey on the EVCWG website, to evaluate audience knowledge and usefulness of developed educational resources.

EVCWG members also discussed how to reach their target audience. Suggestions included presentations at industry-focused and producer-focused meetings, local presentations, and Zoom meetings for stakeholder groups. Methods to disseminate educational materials were also discussed briefly.

Topics to be discussed at future meetings include sustaining communication, future funding, and next steps.

Special announcements were made from various members of the committee.