



Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2024

Location		No. of Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		2	9:05 a.m.	10:35 a.m.	Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restaurateurs:	University of the Virgin Islands (UVI)	Department of Agriculture (VIDA)	Department of Education (VIDE)	Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR)	Economic Development Authority (USVI EDA)
	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)
Voting Members/Designees Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI) DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction 				
Voting Members/Designees Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner 				
Honorary Farmer Members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Abeba Sellassie – We Grow Food, Inc. Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm 				

I. **Welcome, Member Introductions, and Charge**

- The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. by Dr. Hall, Co-Chair of the Local Food and Farm Council, presiding over the meeting.
- Dr. Hall welcomed all members and expressed gratitude for their presence and engagement.
- Dr. Hall recognized Mr. Royce Creque, the Council's newest honorary farmer member.
- Dr. Hall indicated that he would depart the meeting promptly at the top of the hour due to a prior commitment. Dr. Petersen, co-chair, was designated to chair the remainder of the meeting.
- Dr. Hall provided an update regarding the ongoing efforts to finalize the appointment of the Local Food and Farm Coordinator. He mentioned that a forthcoming meeting is scheduled for the following, wherein he and Dr. Petersen will meet with Ms. Sibilly-Brown.
- Dr. Hall conducted a roll call, and each attendee gave brief introductions. Notably, two representatives from Crucian Point, LLC (website) were present as guests. They were encouraged to remain for the initial discussions or rejoin the meeting later, particularly when matters regarding the website would be addressed. They opted for the latter.

II. **Meeting Minutes: January 26, 2024**

- There were no corrections or changes observed to the Minutes.
- Dr. Adamu motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented; seconded by Dr. Habtes.

III. **Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund**

Dr. Hall reviewed and discussed the details of establishing a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) within the Local Food and Farm Council framework, with the primary goal of fostering agricultural development. He outlined the concept of the PPP, underscoring its benefits in pooling resources and potential risks across both public and private sectors. He highlighted past deliberations and research findings. Dr. Hall shared various investment terms, approaches, and selection criteria deemed vital

for the success of the PPP venture. He proposed a revised plan to streamline the process and address potential impediments to participation. This entailed earmarking funds for matching grants to facilitate accessibility for farmers and fishers, as well as providing incentives for the formation of cooperatives alongside support for individual agricultural entities.

Dr. Hall emphasized the significance of meticulously crafting appropriate criteria for investment selection, focusing on factors such as productivity enhancement, transparent fund utilization, financial viability, and robust accountability measures. Particularly notable was the emphasis on stringent accountability protocols, encompassing rigorous monitoring of fund utilization, periodic reporting, on-site farm inspections, and active involvement of beneficiaries in narrating the tangible benefits of investments. Refining the PPP agreement should ensure efficacy in catalyzing agricultural growth while upholding transparency, accountability, and equitable resource allocation principles. Dr. Hall expressed the urgency of formalizing the Public-Private Partnership agreement.

Discussion:

- Dr. Olive emphasized the importance of farming in providing societal benefits such as food security, especially in areas with health issues like diabetes. He inquired about the source of funds for private investment and the role of a nonprofit entity that was supposed to be created as part of the Ag Plan.
 - Dr. Hall responded by explaining that a portion of the approved budget was allocated to the Economic Development Authority (EDA), and other remaining funds were distributed and allocated to other specific governmental agencies. He emphasized the role of the Council in determining eligibility criteria for fund allocation and ensuring accountability. Dr. Hall acknowledged the possibility of replenishing the EDA funds through donations from Economic Development Commission (EDC) companies but expressed a shift in perspective towards continued government funding rather than solely relying on private sector replenishment. He noted the challenges in securing private investments and suggested advocating for additional government funds based on the success of the initial investment. Dr. Hall then underscored the importance of diversifying funding sources while recognizing the limitations of private sector contributions.
- Mr. Creque expressed that there should be a reconsideration of the allocation of funds. He suggested that a greater portion of the funds should be directed towards matching grant programs rather than incentivizing cooperatives' formation. He supported his position by highlighting the challenges associated with establishing and maintaining cooperatives, giving insights gathered on discussions as a member of the Ag Plan Task Force. Furthermore, Mr. Creque raised pertinent questions regarding the Council's criteria for evaluating potential investments. Specifically, he sought clarification on the types of business operations the Council deems necessary for entities seeking funding, thus emphasizing the importance of transparency and clarity in the allocation process.
 - Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of accountability in the allocation of public funds. He underscored the need for entities seeking financial support to furnish evidence of their past business performance, and he suggested that this may include tax records and other pertinent documents. Dr. Hall acknowledged the validity of Mr. Creque's concerns regarding the challenges associated with cooperatives. He expressed an openness to revisiting the distribution of funds based on community feedback and the demonstrated performance of applicants. Dr. Hall stressed the Council's commitment to fostering an environment of transparency and responsible fiscal management, ensuring that allocated funds are utilized effectively and in alignment with community needs and priorities.
- Dr. Habtes highlighted the importance of a robust risk assessment process for evaluating fund distribution, especially when directing funds to private entities. He shared his experience throughout the territory for the distribution of disaster relief funds, and he emphasized the challenges of conducting risk assessments for numerous small-scale grants. Dr. Habtes suggested creating a strategy with established criteria and personnel. He also raised the idea of revenue sharing from private entities using government-provided land or equipment, which could contribute to the fund. Dr. Habtes offers to share legal counsel's input on risk assessment criteria and encourages further discussion on funding opportunities.
 - David Hall acknowledged Dr. Habtes' points and requested any documents related to risk assessment. He suggested relying on EDA for assistance in analysis but emphasized the need for clear criteria from the Council. He stressed the importance of clarifying concrete changes or clarifications needed for the revised proposal. Due to time constraints, Dr. Hall passed the meeting host responsibility to Commissioner Peterson.
 - Dr. Petersen expressed concerns about the classic Private-Public Partnership Investment model. He suggested a different approach due to ownership issues. Dr. Petersen proposed public funding until the industry grows and emphasized the importance of organizing farmers. Also, he suggested that cooperatives should be synonymous with organizations. Dr. Petersen emphasized accountability among farmers in terms of record-keeping and reporting to demonstrate growth resulting from investments.

- Dr. Olive suggested an adjustment to the matching agreement section to include reimbursement alongside the match. He explained how reimbursement could be utilized and gave examples, such as equipment grants regulated by the NRCS, which could provide upfront funding for farmers.
 - Dr. Petersen acknowledged the suggestion and noted it to replenish the funds. He mentioned the percentage can be 90% to 10% or 10% to 90% regarding the funding model. ***Dr. Olive clarified the variability in percentages based on factors like disadvantaged farmers. Dr. Petersen acknowledged the information and expressed his intention to verify it.***

IV. The Agriculture and Food Fair/Agrifest

Dr. Petersen discussed the pre-planning of the Council’s presence at the Agrifest in St. Croix on February 17-19, 2024. He mentioned he would coordinate with Ms. Maynard regarding promotion items and logistics. Dr. Petersen stated that volunteers are needed to man the table at the Fair and called for volunteers to fill time slots at the fair. He said a volunteer schedule will be sent to members for those committing to volunteering.

Discussion:

- Some members expressed that they would be willing to volunteer for a period.
- Dr. Adamu expressed the need for additional volunteers beyond the council members for consistent coverage. He also inquired about covering expenses for volunteers, including travel and accommodation. He suggested considering high school seniors or UVI students for volunteering.

V. Town Hall Meeting

Dr. Petersen covered the proposed dates for the Town Hall Meetings on all three islands. He inquired if there were any concerns about the proposed dates and discussed the format of the Town Hall meetings as a hybrid with both virtual and in-person attendance. He reflected on technical challenges for these types of formats and stressed the need for on-site technical support. He discussed potential venues for the meetings, their duration, and the starting time. He assigned tasks to various members to reserve and secure the venues. Dr. Petersen emphasized the purpose of the Town Hall meetings, which is to provide updates on the activities of the Council and gain public support for the work that the Council is doing. He also discussed the importance of promoting the events, particularly as the dates fall within National Agriculture Week.

Discussion:

- Dr. Adamu inquired about the format of the Town Hall meetings and suggested involving the Communications Team from the School of Agriculture for assistance.
- Dr. Habtes suggested a start time of 6:30 pm.
- Dr. Olive offered to coordinate activities with the Virgin Island Farmers Alliance during National Agriculture Week.
- Mr. Wickrema suggested contacting local media outlets and senators to promote the Town Hall meetings. He mentioned that National Agriculture Week should involve stakeholders like Delegate Plaskett.

VI. Website Building

Dr. Petersen suggested that the discussion on website building should be postponed until the next meeting due to time limitations. He will contact Mr. Shomari Moorehead to give his apologies and explain the situation. He noted the need for the members to submit the requested items for the website, such as their headshots.

VII. Adjournment

Dr. Petersen motioned to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Olive seconded this. The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, February 23, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.