

LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Date:		Start Time	Location		Recorder
8/4/2023		9:36 a.m.	via Zoom Video Conferencing		Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and business owners:	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	Farmer	Farmer	Business Owner	Business Owner
Voting Members Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living 				
Voting Members Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner (VIDE) • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • VIDE Designees: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Maria Melendez-Tirado – Chief of Staff 				
Guest(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torhera Durand – Sustainable Development Associate (UVI Research & Technology Park, Corp) 				

I. Welcome, Introduction of Members and Charge

- Dr. Hall welcomed attendees to the second meeting of the Local Food and Farm Council. He acknowledged the absence of Director Oriol and Dr. Adamu; Director Biggs may possibly be joining virtually due to travel.
- Mr. Wickrema standing in for Dr. Wells-Hedrington, conveyed he'd present VIDE's agenda item: "Seeds of Security" PowerPoint, as requested.
- Dr. Hall recognized guest Torhera Durand from the UVI RT Park, highlighting her involvement in agriculture discussions at their respective senate budget hearing. He shared that the Senate Finance Committee chair encouraged the RT Park to engage with the Council.
- Dr. Hall mentioned the meeting's possible extension. He said he would periodically invite other organizations to the meetings, and he noted that the members could do the same to others interested in contributing to the Council's agricultural objectives.
- Dr. Angeli, the DPNR designee, affirmed her voting authority for the meeting.
- Dr. Hall emphasized collaborative decision-making within the Council, where members or their designees hold voting powers based on the law.

II. Meeting Minutes: July 18, 2023

- Dr. Hall inquired if members were prepared to approve the Minutes or preferred waiting until the next meeting. He mentioned that any future concerns regarding the Minutes from absent members could be addressed in the next meeting.
- The Minutes were approved as presented.

III. VI Agricultural Plan - *Status report on the selection of Farmers for Council Appointment*

- Dr. Petersen discussed his recent Senate budget hearing, where questions arose about the farmers' appointments to the Council. He revealed that three farmers, one per island, had been recommended to the governor for appointment. However, they are absent due to not receiving their appointment letters yet.
- Dr. Hall asked if the nominees could participate in meetings before the Senate confirmation, suggesting their active involvement while awaiting formal approval. He emphasized the need to expedite their appointment letters.

IV. "Seeds of Security" Program – presented by Mr. Wickrema on behalf of the VI Department of Education

Attachment: [Seeds of Security PPT Presentation](#)

- Mr. Wickrema indicated that the Seeds of Security program's proposal involves initiating a pilot project encompassing students from pre-K to grade 12. This endeavor will be undertaken by six schools: two from Saint Croix, two from Saint Thomas, and two from Saint Johns.
- **Discussion:**
 - Dr. Petersen expressed concerns about the curriculum and lesson seeming unclear, and he emphasized the importance of a structured approach for clear outcomes and student expectations.
 - Dr. Hall said that he welcomed using the Ag Plan Task Force curriculum as a guide for the pilot program. He said the Council should aim to adopt this curriculum with any necessary updates. **Mr. Wickrema confirmed that the Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum supports using the Ag Plan curriculum.**
 - Dr. Petersen inquired about the October 2023 launch and necessary preparatory actions. **Mr. Wickrema confirmed the launch plans and indicated that the Director of Sustainability, once hired, will collaborate with Dr. Petersen and Dr. Usman on the program. This individual will report to the Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum Development.**
 - Dr. Hall inquired about the entirety of the operating budget for the program, including salaries, program launch, and development. He emphasized the Council's responsibility for accountable fund usage as approved by the legislature.
 - Dr. Hall highlighted the importance of marketing and outreach. He referenced the email from Ms. Mary Moorehead dated July 26, 2023, in which she anticipates the curriculum to be fully implemented.

Actions:

1. The Council will ask VIDE for a detailed budget for the Program before the next meeting.
2. The Council voted to approve that VIDE implement the Seeds of Security initiative.

V. Agriculture Business Center Proposal and Budget – presented by Dr. Hall

Attachment: [ABC Proposal and Budget](#)

- Dr. Hall explained that funding for the Agriculture Business Center (ABC) was provided through the Act. The ABC will integrate with SBDC across both islands, with outreach to St. John. The primary objective is to enhance existing resources and address the business requirements of the farming community. Services will include one-on-one business guidance, skill enhancement, promoting agriculture involvement, utilizing EDA and RT Park resources, aiding with tax filing, and more. To fulfill all the needs, will require hiring grant writers. The implemented target date of this initiative is October 2023.
- **Discussion:**
 - Dr. Petersen asked for clarification on whether grant writers would serve to secure agency funding or assist farmers. **Dr. Hall responded that the grant writers would support farmers of all sizes and mentioned potential matching funds under the EDA.**
 - Dr. Petersen also asked about the \$13K allocated in the same Act and wanted to know if this amount is part of the matching funds or related to something else. **Dr. Hall explained it's part of the matching funds, likely from the \$500K allotted to the EDA The \$500K serves two purposes: (1) establishing a public-private investment fund for farmers to have capital infusion; (2) enabling farmers to seek matching funds for grants. Director Biggs will share proposed guidelines for these funds.**

- Dr. Angeli emphasized that the training and skills covered directly relate to the farming and fishing communities. She stated that the diverse courses would benefit farmers and fishers of all levels, as they will provide the essential training needed to comprehend documents, find suitable grants, and promote growth. Dr. Angeli proposed minor amendments to the proposal, incorporating the fishing industry to enhance inclusivity for the fishing community. **Dr. Hall responded that the proposed amendment is significant, not small. He gave context to the Task Force's decision not to include the fishing community in the Ag Plan, as this was not part of the charge, and there was no outreach to this community. Dr. Hall believes this is an important matter to address, but incorporating the fishing community now without understanding their needs may be inappropriate. He suggests that the full body of the Council should make the decision to include the fishing community.**
- Ms. Durand mentioned that the beekeeping community could benefit from involvement with the Ag Business Center. She noted RT Park's efforts to engage small business owners or younger individuals Agri-Tech ideas, especially given the aging farmer demographic. Ms. Durand highlighted RT Park's initiatives, including the Idea Incubator and Accelerator Program. **Dr. Hall expressed interest in a future presentation by Ms. Durand on RT Park's sustainability efforts and recommended she connect with Dr. Usman and Dr. Kendra Harris, Dean of the UVI School of Business.**

Actions:

1. The integration of the fishing community into the Agriculture Business Center proposal will be scheduled for discussion in the upcoming meeting.
2. Dr. Hall will community the Council's suggestion to Dr. Harris (ABC) regarding incorporating the fishing community into the proposal.
3. The Council approved the initiation of the Agriculture Business Center.

VI. Local Food and Farm Coordinator – presented by Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr.

Attachment: [Food and Farm Council Staffing](#)

- Dr. Petersen shared that VIDA had secured funding exceeding \$350K for their budget. Additionally, he mentioned that VIDA formally submitted a request to the legislature to extend the funding beyond the current fiscal year so that they can continue to utilize it.
- Dr. Petersen presented the Food and Farm Council Staffing needs. He shared that after the last meeting, once he started to develop the Farm and Food Coordinator job description, it became clear that additional staffing would be necessary. Dr. Petersen's presentation introduced three supplementary positions with salary ranges: Executive Assistant, Marketing Program Manager, and Outreach and Education Program Manager. Dr. Petersen proposed that the Food and Farm coordinator be part of the VIDA Marketing Division.
- **Discussion:**
 - Dr. Hall pointed out that the original intention behind the Farm and Food Coordinator role was for this person to play a central administrative role in overseeing the implementation of the Ag Plan under the guidance of the Council. However, the current role presentation appears that the coordinator's responsibilities will focus more on VIDA's operating functions. **Dr. Petersen suggested that the coordinator's responsibilities could be amended to grant the Council greater oversight in implementing the Ag Plan.**
 - Dr. Hall inquired about the rationale of having the coordinator report to the VIDA Marketing Division rather than directly to the Commissioner's office. He expressed concern about a potential conflict arising from this organizational structure, where Council assigned tasks might conflict with the primary duties under the Marketing Division. **Dr. Petersen clarified that during VIDA's discussions, the Coordinator and associated staff were heavily involved in marketing and branding campaigns. He stated that he could review and modify the coordinator's responsibilities.**
 - Dr. Hall asked about the status of the vacant Marketing Director position is vacant and sought distinctions between the Marketing Program Manager and the Outreach Program Manager roles. Also, will all the positions be located on the same island? **Dr. Petersen confirmed the vacancy of the Director position and explained that the Outreach Manager focuses on education and ensuring that farmers and the community are well-informed about the Council's activities. On the other hand, the Marketing Program is primarily**

responsible for developing branding campaigns and other initiatives. Also, the Marketing Program Manager may be in St. Thomas, and the other positions are in St. Croix.

- Dr. Hall asked about the availability of funds to hire for other vacant roles that address the technical needs under VIDA that were outlined in the Ag Plan through outreach by the farmers to fill a void in this area. **Dr. Petersen believes there was some additional funding to address the technical needs of farmers; however, he will have to verify.**

Action(s):

- 1. The Council deferred approval of the submitted Food and Farm Council staffing proposal until further discussion in the next meeting.**
- 2. Dr. Petersen will follow up on the remaining pending matters and subsequently update the Council.**

VII. Next Meeting

- It was agreed that the next meeting will be held Friday, August 18, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.

VIII. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.