



# LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL

## Meeting Minutes

Date:		Start Time	Location		Recorder
11/09/2023		9:05 a.m.	via Zoom Video Conferencing		Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restauranteurs:	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"> <li>Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI)</li> <li>Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE)</li> <li>Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI)</li> <li>DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife</li> <li>VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living</li> </ul>				
Voting Members Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)</li> <li>Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)</li> <li>Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner (VIDE)</li> <li>VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction</li> </ul>				
Guest(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attorney Marie Thomas Griffith</li> </ul>				

### I. Welcome, Introduction of Members and Charge

- The meeting was called to order at 9:03 a.m. by Dr. Hall, Co-Chair of the Local Food and Farm Council.
- Dr. Hall thanked members for their attendance and participation.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged and welcomed guest Attorney Marie Thomas-Griffith.

### II. Meeting Minutes: October 27, 2023

- There were no corrections, amendments, or objections observed to the Minutes.
- Dr. Petersen motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented, which was seconded by Mr. Wickrema.

### III. Agriculture Business Center Update and Announcement

- Dr. Hall announced that the new director of SBDC, Mr. John Morosco, informed him that the Agriculture Business Center is ready to launch. He shared that the center's grand opening is scheduled for December 7<sup>th</sup> on St. Croix, with a similar event planned for St. Thomas in January 2024. Dr. Hall reported that while he and Dr. Petersen had been invited, he had requested that invitations be extended to the entire Council for the opening event. He emphasized the importance of establishing the center, as he believed showcasing this resource would be crucial to farmers and fishers. Additionally, he mentioned plans to incorporate the Agriculture Business Center into the council's outreach efforts scheduled for January. He said attending the grand opening would give them a better understanding of the services offered by the center.

### IV. Public Private Partnership Investment Fund & Agreements - Attorney Marie Thomas-Griffith

- There were introductory remarks by Dr. Hall, and the members introduced themselves. Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of Attorney Thomas Griffith's presence for two primary purposes. Firstly, creating a local food and farm fund required establishing a nonprofit entity to receive private sector contributions. Secondly, the commitment to initiate a public-private

investment fund, which was already partially funded. He expressed the uniqueness of this investment and the need for legal advice on structuring the associated agreements.

- Attorney Marie Thomas Griffith expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to address the Council and introduced herself as an experienced legal practitioner with 29 years of experience in regulatory transactional work. She emphasized her willingness and commitment to work closely with the Council to understand concepts and needs to support the Council's sustainability and food security goals in the Territory. Attorney Thomas Griffith sought clarification on the Council's vision for funding and approval processes, including the potential for differing tiers of matching support and the distinction between grant and loan programs. She also mentioned her expertise in forming 501(c)(3) exempt entities and offered this service to the Council at no cost. Regarding the immediate need for drafting templates, she assured the Council that she could complete this task efficiently once their expectations and rollout plans were clarified. She also inquired about the possibility of a tiered rollout structure for the various programs outlined in the documents provided.

#### Discussion Points:

- Dr. Hall thanked Attorney Thomas Griffith for offering to handle the formation of the 501(c)(3) entity as a gift to the Council, highlighting its significance. He provided an overview of the Council's vision for various programs: loan programs, grant matching, and the investment arm. He stressed the importance of simplifying complex language in investment agreements to ensure clarity and avoid intimidating farmers.
- Attorney Marie Thomas Griffith endorsed long-term profit sharing and equity interests for farmers. She proposed alternative non-equity partnerships for hesitant farmers. Highlighting the need for transparency, she recommended requiring funded farmers to report on fund usage, establishing this as a critical term in all agreements. Further, she referenced that a company such as Catch a Fire National can assist farmers in completing grant applications, understanding contracts, and managing complex business language. **Dr. Hall responded that the role of the Agriculture Business Center will support farmers and fishers with business operations and various applications. He acknowledged the possibility that the Center may not meet all needs and suggested alternative resources like 'Catch a Fire' in such cases.**
- Dr. Petersen emphasized the need to establish templates and guidelines for ownership in farming entities and supported farmers owning ownership, noting that most farmers do not own their land outright. He stressed the importance of considering this limitation as the agreement framework is being developed—additionally, Dr. Petersen agreed that farmers should align with and receive services from the business center and suggested incorporating ongoing education through courses into the template and structure.
- Mr. Wickrema emphasized the need for accountability by suggesting that even small donations should be subjected to financial auditing to prevent potential misuse of funds. He also suggested limiting the initial amount given due to budget constraints. Lastly, he suggested that the council consider obtaining general liability insurance to protect the entity if anything goes wrong with the venture, given the land ownership factor and involvement.
- Dr. Angeli shared insights on drafting agreements for farmer ownership programs from her perspective as a St. Croix farmer. She mentioned existing templates from traditional mortgages and USDA loans could be a foundation. These templates could be familiar to farmers who have experience with land mortgages and repossession terms. Dr. Angeli emphasized the importance of flexibility in the agreements to accommodate various types of equity, not just land ownership, as USDA Rural loans encompass different forms of equity, such as material goods. She supported the idea of reinvesting profits into the fund for sustainability. She stressed that the agreements should be palatable to farmers who were initially hesitant about government ownership involvement. She said that flexibility in the terms could make such agreements more acceptable to farmers, ensuring the program's success.
- Dr. Adamu noted that these services align with what the Agribusiness Center is expected to provide, focusing on the business aspect of agriculture. Additionally, he highlighted the collaboration between the Agribusiness Center and the agricultural cooperative extension service, which will cater to the educational needs of farmers. He emphasized that farmers prefer practical, hands-on workshops over academic-oriented courses, which the cooperative extension service is well-equipped to provide.
- Attorney Thomas Griffith raised concerns about setting caps or limits on the support being provided to farmers to ensure broad accessibility.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged the need for balance in determining the appropriate investment amounts, considering the impact and the number of farmers who can benefit. He also emphasized the importance of objective criteria for funding decisions to avoid favoritism.
- Dr. Hall discussed and explored the 501(c)(3) entity's structure, whether select members of the council should serve in that capacity or that it should be new board members. Also, what should be the potential entity names?

- The liability insurance for the 501(c)(3) entity was discussed further, and Attorney Thomas Griffith suggested that the council consult with an insurance professional.

#### V. **Fishers Engagement Survey**

- Dr. Angeli discussed key findings from the Fishers Engagement Survey. The survey had 27 respondents, representing approximately 10% of commercial fishers in the territory, with over 75% having more than 20 years of fishing experience. Challenges such as limited markets, high costs, and difficulty applying for grants and loans were highlighted, affecting over 70% of fishers. Many participants expressed interest in improving grant writing and tax preparation skills through workshops. Further, the results show that the fishers seek additional government assistance, especially for a fish hatchery project to restock oceans.

#### Discussion Points:

- Dr. Adamu highlighted question 4 in the survey, which assesses the perception of fish stock decline. He mentioned the challenges faced by the fishing industry and the need for improvement. He mentioned the idea of an active conservation program and the importance of rebuilding the agriculture and fisher faculty.
- Mr. Wickrema discussed the potential for collaboration in aquaponic systems with schools and for DPNR to serve in a faculty/presentation role. **Dr. Angeli stated that DPNR is willing to collaborate with educational institutions and community engagement and that education is a crucial component of future success in the industry.**
- Dr. Hall mentioned that there may be a need to develop an abbreviated survey for outreach efforts. He emphasized the importance of continuous feedback mechanisms for fishing and farming communities. He recommended discontinuing the current survey and planning for better feedback instruments during outreach, community engagement through events, and a website launch to make resources available to the farming and fishing communities.

#### VI. **Subcommittee to establish a territorial Future Farmers of America Organization**

- Dr. Petersen stated that a meeting is scheduled at 1:00 pm to discuss reestablishing a **Future Farmers of America Organization** in the territory. He stated that he would share more information in the next meeting.

#### VII. **Other Business**

##### Status of letter to St. John Farmers:

- Dr. Petersen stated the VIDA has assembled a list of St. John farmers. He said that in addition to emails, they also have mailing addresses as another distribution channel. He suggested that VIDA issue the letters to the farmers and for him and Dr. Hall to sign the letter to the farmers. **Dr. Hall stated that he had no objections to these suggestions.**

##### Logo and Letterhead Design:

- Ms. Maynard shared the presentation of the updated logo, symbol, letterhead options, and promotional items submitted by Ms. Bougouneau.

**Voting Members' Final Decision:** (1) The council members accepted the logo and symbol as presented. (2) The council members voted for version #1 of the letterhead options. Ms. Bougouneau will be tasked with enhancing the letterhead and providing the council with two updated versions.

##### Website Developments:

- Ms. Maynard stated that she has contacted Shomari Moorehead, owner of Crucian Point Consulting, to develop the council's website. She shared that a website questionnaire was distributed to the council members for review and their input on the questionnaire.
- Dr. Hall stated that the council should aim to have the website up and running in the first quarter of next year. He stated that consideration should be given to the cost and overall maintenance of the website.
- Dr. Adamu stated the website should be dynamic and updated regularly.

##### Meeting Schedule:

- Dr. Hall stated for the upcoming year, he recommends that the biweekly meeting should be continued to ensure that the council is ready to launch all the outreach programs and website launch.
- Dr. Angeli shared that she will be taking maternity leave soon and that Commissioner Oriol or Dr. Ibanez will attend the meetings in my absence.

#### VIII. **Next Meeting:** The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 21, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

#### IX. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:44 a.m.