



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

May 17, 2024

Location		No. of Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		0	2:14 p.m.	3:31 p.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)
Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) • VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition 				
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 • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – The B-Hive Farm Collective 				

I. Welcome, Member Introductions, and Charge

- Dr. Hall called the meeting to order at 2:14 p.m.
- Dr. Hall warmly welcomed the members and expressed his gratitude for their flexibility of the change in the meeting time, given their busy schedule. He said he hopes to return to the usual Friday morning schedule.
- Dr. Hall proposed reordering the agenda after the approval of the Meeting Minutes.

II. Meeting Minutes: April 19, 2024

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Dr. Olive moved to approve the meeting minutes as presented, with Dr. Angeli seconding the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no abstentions or objections.

III. Debriefing of Tri-Island Town Hall Meetings

- Dr. Hall thanked the members for their attendance and support at the Town Hall meetings held in St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, respectively. He noted that for the St. Croix meeting, there were technology issues due to the university's internet challenges, which affected online participation. Dr. Hall said that despite the challenges, there was good attendance and commitment from members and participants. He invited feedback from the members to identify key takeaways and lessons.

Discussion:

- Mr. Wickrema shared that he attended the St. John meeting in person. He highlighted Ms. Sibilly-Brown's enthusiasm and contributions and praised the efficient management of the Town Halls. He described the meetings as informative and engaging.
- Dr. Olive seconded Mr. Wickrema's positive comments, acknowledging Dr. Hall and Ms. Sibilly-Brown's excellent leadership. This recognition of their efforts makes them feel appreciated and recognized.
- Dr. Adamu apologized for his late arrival but concurred with previous positive comments. He said he appreciated Dr. Hall's leadership during the Town Halls.

- Ms. Sibilly-Brown expressed surprise at the high attendance despite short notice and concurrent carnival events. She noted productive engagement and well-thought-out questions from the community. She also strongly emphasized the commitment to addressing community concerns and maintaining an open dialogue, reassuring the community that their voices are heard and valued.
- Dr. Petersen was surprised but pleased by the turnout. He recognized the high level of enthusiasm and hope among farmers and fishermen. He also stressed the importance of maintaining momentum and meeting commitments.
- Mr. Creque commented on the farming community's anticipation and readiness for the Town Halls. He confirmed the positive turnout and community interest.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged that at the St. Croix Town Hall, an issue was raised regarding funding allocations for post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria. He stated that he had requested Dr. Angeli to provide background information on the situation for the Council's understanding. Dr. Hall indicated that Dr. Angeli had prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the matter for presentation to the Council.

IV. **DPNR Presentation by Dr. Nicole Angeli: Funding to Fishers post Hurricanes Irma and Maria**

- Dr. Angeli began her presentation by clarifying the purpose of the one-time funding for hurricane disaster reimbursements from 2017, addressing misunderstandings about the program's intent. She explained that the Division of Fish and Wildlife must consider U.S. Virgin Islands residents' social and economic needs, including those related to fisheries. The division is entirely federally funded, with the most recent funding from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). Dr. Angeli provided an overview of the division's funding, noting that the average budget includes 21% from NOAA, while the current budget has 64% from NOAA due to the CARES Act and hurricane disaster relief funds. A significant portion of the budget is allocated to disaster relief and direct assistance to fishers. She detailed the disaster relief process, which involved extensive data submission to NOAA and took until 2019 for approval. The funds reimbursed fishers for losses and coral reef restoration projects.

She highlighted that \$6.3 million was distributed for direct reimbursements. Fishers self-certified their needs and provided receipts for boats, engines, coolers, and other essential equipment replacements. Additionally, \$1.4 million was allocated to coral reef restoration, supporting projects like the coral hub in Princess and an artificial reef at Coky Point. Dr. Angeli discussed the challenges in data collection and the need for improvement. The division collects data on fish prices and economic impact annually to analyze and estimate income losses post-disaster. However, more funding for enforcement and data collection infrastructure remains a significant challenge.

Dr. Angeli suggested including experienced fishers in the Local Food and Farm Council to enhance the council's effectiveness. She recommended Mabel Maldonado from St. Croix and Winston Lee Day from St. Thomas/St. John is an honorary fisher due to their extensive experience and contributions to the fishing community.

In response to comments, Dr. Angeli emphasized that the funds were reimbursement-based, requiring fishers to provide receipts. This ensured that the money was used to replace essential equipment lost in hurricanes, aiding recovery. She concluded by expressing her willingness to answer further questions and mentioned sharing the presentation slides with Ms. Maynard to distribute to the members.

Key Discussion Points:

1. Coral Reef Preservation and Public Education:

- **Mr. Wickrema** raised concerns about the impact of toxic sunscreen on coral reefs despite existing laws prohibiting its sale and use.
- **Dr. Angeli** emphasized that enforcement should fall to the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLC). She highlighted the need for grants to support public education on this issue, as current funds are federally allocated and specific to other outreach programs, such as fishing clinics and Ocean Explorer scholarships.

2. Disaster Relief and Agricultural Funding:

- **Ms. Sibilly-Brown** discussed the disparity in disaster relief efforts between fishers and farmers, stressing the need for a straightforward process to ensure farmers receive support in future disasters. She recommended familiarizing the Council with the FSA disaster declaration process and ensuring that future declarations cover fishers and farmers.
- **Dr. Hall** clarified the Council's authority to amend the Agricultural Plan, including the inclusion of fishers in relief efforts. He emphasized the need for transparent communication and education about the Council's actions and decisions.

3. **Funding Allocation and Disbursement:**

- **Dr. Angeli** confirmed that data on fund recipients is available and could be shared, ensuring transparency without disclosing individual names.
- **Dr. Petersen** noted that farmers were provided with local funding for drought relief, but the amounts and specific allocations needed to be more detailed during the meeting.
- **Mr. Creque** and Dr. Olive provided insights into receiving federal funds post-hurricane and more minor local fund disbursements through the Department of Agriculture.

4. **Council Authority and Legislative Compliance:**

- **Dr. Hall** reviewed the Council's mandate and confirmed its authority to amend the Agricultural Plan and include fishers based on the legislative act.
- He highlighted the importance of having a well-documented basis for decisions to address potential challenges from the community.
- **Dr. Angeli** will provide data on the number of fishers who received disaster funds and the amounts disbursed.
- Dr. Petersen further clarified and confirmed local drought relief fund amounts.
- Dr. Hall said continued efforts are needed to educate and engage farming and fishing communities about the Council's initiatives and disaster relief processes.

Action Items:

- **Dr. Angeli** will provide the Council with non-confidential data on disaster fund recipients.
- **Dr. Petersen** will confirm and report the total amount of local drought relief funds provided to farmers.
- **Dr. Hall** will ensure the Council maintains transparency and clear communication about including fishers in disaster relief efforts based on the legislative act.

V. **Review and Reapproval of LFFC Updated Documents**

- Dr. Hall stated that in the previous LFFC meeting, in the presentation by Legal Counsel, Attorney Marie Thomas-Griffith engaged in discussions regarding several key documents: *the Conflict of Interest Policy, the Funding Agreement, and the Funding Application Review and Selection Subcommittee*. He said that following those discussions, Legal Counsel made revisions to these documents, addressing concerns raised during our last meeting. While these documents had been approved previously, Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of reapproving them with the updates provided by Legal Counsel. He stressed that these documents are crucial for our operations and are now being presented for reapproval.
- **Conflict of Interest Policy:**
 - Dr. Hall underscored the fairness of the revised Conflict of Interest Policy. He pointed out potential conflicts, such as members or their relatives having financial interests in businesses applying for funds, receiving compensation or gifts from such entities, or having personal relationships with applicants. He assured the members that these situations are transparently handled through a declaration process. He reiterated that the policy is pending final signatures from the members.
 - Dr. Hall then formally requested a motion to approve the revised conflict of interest policy and the other updated documents to proceed with the approval process.

Discussion:

- Dr. Olive raised a question regarding the potential conflict of interest for Council Members who own farms and might apply for funding. Dr. Hall clarified that even honorary council members should declare such conflicts, emphasizing transparency. He explained that declaring conflicts doesn't disqualify individuals from receiving funding but ensures awareness within the Council.
- Mr. Wickrema moved to approve the revised Conflict of Interest Policy as presented, with Mr. Creque seconding the motion. The Policy was unanimously approved with no abstentions or objections.

- **Funding Application Review and Selection Subcommittee:**

- Dr. Hall introduced the second document, focusing on the Funding Application and Review and Selection Subcommittee. He explained that revisions were made to clarify the role of Advisors versus members, particularly in section 2 regarding voting members. Emphasizing the need to protect farming members, Dr. Hall highlighted the importance of fair decisions despite potential conflicts of interest. He also addressed concerns about the selection process, ensuring transparency and fairness in decision-making. Dr. Hall noted plans to respond to concerns regarding potential advantages for Council Members. After discussion,

Discussion:

- Dr. Adamu moved to approve the presented revised Funding Application Review and Selection Subcommittee, with Mr. Wickrema seconding the motion. The Funding Application Review and Selection was unanimously approved with no abstentions or objections.

- **Funding Agreement:**

- Dr. Hall explained the purpose and details of the funding agreement that entities must sign upon being selected to receive funding. He emphasized that this agreement is essential for entities to officially receive the funds, ensuring clarity and compliance with the program's requirements.
- Dr. Hall reviewed the various key components of the agreement, including its terms and conditions, obligations, and legal considerations. The agreement clearly states that the funds are not a loan and do not involve interest or annual percentage rates, but some terms must be strictly followed. If the funding includes a matching component, the recipient is responsible for fulfilling the federal grant terms associated with the matching funds. Additionally, the agreement specifies the percentage of the overall grant that the matching funds satisfy. Dr. Hall pointed out that recipients must operate in good faith, notifying the Council of any significant changes, such as a change of entity name or control. The agreement includes standard legal language confirming the recipient's commitment to providing accurate information and financial reports for a period after receiving the funds. It allows the assignment of the agreement to another party with written consent from the Council.
- Dr. Hall concluded by noting that the final section of the agreement requires signatures from both the recipient and a representative of the Local Food and Farm Council. He mentioned that there might be further discussions regarding notarizing these agreements. Dr. Hall reemphasized that our Legal Counsel thoroughly reviewed the funding agreement.

Discussion:

- Ms. Sibilly-Brown raised concerns about liability if someone gets injured using equipment purchased with the funds, suggesting explicit language to hold the Local Food and Farm Council harmless. She asked about the procedure if the recipient passes away without a succession plan, questioning whether the equipment should be reclaimed or passed to the recipient's family. Further, she inquired about insurance requirements for equipment purchased with the funds, particularly in natural disasters like hurricanes. Ms. Sibilly-Brown suggested these points be addressed in future discussions or clarified in the current agreement.
- Dr. Hall explained the necessity of the funding agreement for entities to receive funds, ensuring clarity and compliance. He acknowledged concerns raised by Ms. Sibilly-Brown regarding liability, succession, and insurance. Dr. Hall stated that Ms. Maynard referred these concerns to Legal Counsel to clarify these issues. He noted that the Agreement gives the Council the right to reclaim equipment if the recipient can no longer fulfill the Agreement due to death. Dr. Hall also mentioned the possibility of allowing the equipment to remain within the family if someone is willing to continue the operation. He sought the Council's approval of the Agreement with the understanding that Legal Counsel may suggest additional changes.
- Dr. Petersen moved to approve the revised Funding Agreement, with Dr. Olive seconding the motion. The Funding Agreement was unanimously approved with no abstentions or objections.

VI. Product Symbol Stickers and Distribution Process:

- Dr. Hall initiated the discussion by addressing the issue of symbols, specifically the labels and stickers for the Local Food and Farm Council products. He mentioned that the Council was running low on these labels and asked Ms. Maynard to provide an update on the costs and acquisition of additional labels. Dr. Hall emphasized the need to discuss the delivery mechanism and ensure the stickers are used on non-local products before finalizing the costs.

Discussion:

- Ms. Maynard stated that she contacted Ms. Bougouneau for a quote on at least 10,000 stickers. She needed to discuss the distribution and quantity. She suggested using the Agriculture Business Center for distribution or setting up an online order system on the website.
- Ms. Sibilly-Brown proposed creating a one-pager detailing the eligibility criteria for using the stickers, including definitions of locally grown and value-added products. She suggested having major farmers sign off on this guideline to certify proper usage. This approach would help track and determine the quantity of stickers needed. Ms. Sibilly-Brown suggested forming a subcommittee to discuss the strategy further.
- Dr. Hall asked Ms. Sibilly-Brown to chair the subcommittee and collaborate with representatives from the Department of Agriculture and others experienced in the farming community.
- Mr. Creque expressed concerns about potential misuse if the stickers get into the wrong hands, suggesting that only local farmers registered with the Department of Agriculture should receive them.
- Dr. Olive shared similar concerns, citing the current lack of adequate policing for non-local products being sold as local in markets. He stressed the importance of thorough vetting before distributing the stickers to avoid validating incorrect practices. Dr. Olive added that the program should also extend to restaurants using locally grown products, suggesting comprehensive guidelines and verification processes are needed.

- Dr. Petersen echoed these concerns, noting that it would require significant planning, strategic work, and a degree of vigilance and reliance on the honor system. He supported starting with clear criteria and monitoring those who receive the stickers, though acknowledging the challenge of preventing unauthorized use. Dr. Petersen mentioned a related initiative involving farmer support for PPP applications and suggested involving the Ag business center in these discussions.
- Mr. Wickrema volunteered to join the subcommittee, mentioning his related program, "Made in the Virgin Islands," which focuses on food security and composting.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:31 p.m.

IX. Next Meeting

The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, May 31, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.