



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

June 14, 2024

Location		No. of Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		0	9:04 a.m.	10:31 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)
Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living • 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 • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – The B-Hive Farm Collective • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition 				
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) • 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 				

I. Welcome, Member Introductions, and Charge

- Dr. Hall called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged the members who had provided advanced notice of their absence.

II. Meeting Minutes: May 31, 2024

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

III. Status of Welcoming Honorary Fishers

- Dr. Hall inquired about the status of the two potential honorary fishers with Dr. Angeli.
- Dr. Angeli reported that the fishers have not yet received their official invitations and the meeting link from the Council. Dr. Hall stated that the invitation letters would be sent to the fishers before the next meeting.

IV. LFFC Invitation Before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

- Dr. Hall shared that he had received the official invitation notice from the Office of Senator Donna Frett Gregory, to testify before the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. He highlighted a few that should be listed in the Testimony.
- Dr. Hall stressed the need to verify when funds were received by entities, as delays often occur despite Senate assumptions of immediate receipt.

V. Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund Recent Developments

- Dr. Hall reported that the Selection Subcommittee had met on the Friday following the last meeting to finalize and approve the evaluation criteria and form. He shared that the building and implementation of an automated evaluation system had slowed down the process. Ms. Maynard stated that access to the system would be available to the subcommittee members by the following Tuesday at the latest.
- Dr. Hall emphasized to Ms. Maynard the urgency of updating the subcommittee members once the system is available to ensure timely completion of evaluations.

VI. VI Agricultural Plan Implementation and Tracker

- Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of monitoring, tracking, and reporting the accomplishments funded by the recent allocations to the various entities. He introduced the Ag Plan Tracker, which details funds received, their purposes, related mandates, and current statuses.

V.I. Department of Agriculture:

- Ms. Abeba Sellassie inquired about the positions of an engineer and a soil tester and sought confirmation that these funds would be paid from the LFFC budget, allotted to the Department of Agriculture. She also asked about the future of these positions once the funds are depleted.
 - Dr. Hall clarified that these positions were approved by the Legislature, and are funded by allocated resources, now part of the Department of Agriculture's budget. The positions include a civil engineer, a plant pathologist, and an administrative assistant. Further, Dr. Hall explained that continuous funding from the legislature will be necessary, emphasizing the need to demonstrate the ongoing importance of these roles and their achievements to secure annual funding.
- Dr. Olive inquired about the Farm and Food Coordinator position, specifically whether it is a part-time role and the plans for the other half of the position.
- Dr. Hall confirmed that the current Coordinator position is part-time. He emphasized the need to evaluate the coordinator's progress and effectiveness before making any changes. He also noted that the Coordinator is expected to outline her near-term goals for review. Dr. Hall went on to explain that the position is administratively within the Department of Agriculture to maintain the department's significance, but the Coordinator's work is directed by the Council. He mentioned that any changes to the position's administrative location would require legislative approval.
- Ms. Brown agreed that the role would eventually need to be full-time and might require additional support. She stressed the importance of establishing proper office infrastructure before hiring a permanent full-time person. She highlighted the need for clear reporting lines, travel budgets, and outreach plans. Ms. Brown also shared her previous experience with inadequate infrastructure in a similar role, emphasizing the need for proper systems. She proposed a community education campaign to raise awareness about the Food and Farm Council's role and mandates. Further, Ms. Brown outlined three key priorities: institutionalizing the role, conducting a community education campaign, and prioritizing the Council's mandates.
- Dr. Angeli suggested that consideration be given to housing the coordinator position within the UVI Cooperative Extension Service instead of the Department of Agriculture. She cited potential benefits in flexibility and community integration by moving the position to UVI.
- Mr. Creque stated that he supports the current structure for the Coordinator's position to remain within the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Angeli suggested keeping an open mind on alternative models, and Dr. Hall reiterated the need to identify specific problems before considering structural changes. Dr. Hall emphasized that the current structure should be given a chance to function effectively before making changes.

V.I. Economic Development Authority:

- Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of documenting the efforts made to raise awareness about the application process for funding from the VI Economic Authority, such as town halls and advertisements. **Dr. Olive suggested reporting the total value of applications received versus available funding to the Legislature to highlight the need for additional funds.**
- Dr. Hall agreed, confirming this information would be shared after the selection process. He stressed the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between the Selection Committee and the broader Council to avoid conflicts of interest and protect the Council from criticisms. Lastly, Dr. Hall mentioned the need to confirm the exact date when the funding was received.

V.I. Department of Education:

- Dr. Hall confirmed that the Director of Sustainability has been hired and will start on July 1st. He stated the need to document the director's name, their activity before school starts, and the pilot's launch at the start of the school year.
- Mr. Wickrema stated that the person has been hired; however, he would allow Dr. Charleswell or Dr. Wells to announce the name.
- Dr. Hall stated that the Department needs to submit a report before the hearing, including the director's name and their plans before school starts and during the school year. He mentioned that it can become challenging to request additional funding when the current funds haven't been utilized effectively. If possible, the Department of Education should provide an update at the next meeting.

V.I. Agriculture Business Center:

- Dr. Hall stated that a Director of the AgBC has been hired, Ms. Shanta Roberts. However, he said the Council needs more specific information such as how many farmers have utilized their services, what types of services have been provided, and assistance with completing applications for the private and public investment fund. Even if they assisted only one or two individuals, that information would be helpful. Additionally, He said there should be a report on individuals hired by the center, as this will support our request for continued funding and show how allocated funds have been used.
- Ms. Sellassie asked, how did the center assist the farmers? She said that she received feedback that farmers feel their needs aren't being met. During the grant application process, many farmers struggled with the language and process, feeling the center's responses made them more insecure. Farmers expected more comprehensive help, not just rewording of their submissions. Specifically, she said that her expectations had not been met and that we should ask why the center couldn't provide more effective assistance.
- Dr. Hall acknowledged the excellent question and stated that if farmers aren't getting the needed support, they should provide feedback to our Local Food and Farm Coordinator or the Council members. He said that the Council would need specific complaints to address them properly. He stated that the AgBC isn't there to fill out applications for farmers but to assist and guide them. Dr. Hall emphasized that these types of concerns are taken seriously to ensure the center meets the needs of the farmers. He said that we need to ensure the feedback reaches the center and the Council for oversight.
- Ms. Brown stated that there is a need to integrate regular intervals where the Ag Business Center interacts with the local food and council person. She said that we should ask visitors if their contact information can be shared for random quality assurance calls and embed a short survey immediately after receiving help. This feedback can help improve services. Additionally, there's a step before the AgBC to prepare farmers for readiness. This process is new, and we should be mindful of helping the center serve farmers better. Ms. Brown noted that In St. John, she received feedback that indicated that the center's personnel did an excellent job, so we should look at readiness and inform the experience for farmers.
- Dr. Olive echoed Ms. Brown's points. He said Typically, in standard procedures, participants receive contact information for feedback, such as, whether the AgBC is providing the telephone number or email for the Local Food Coordinator to the Farmers. How is this feedback being responded to? This could be a great outlet for oversight.

UVI – Office of Sponsored Program:

- Dr. Hall stated that a report was received from the OSP about the grants they've identified and pursued. Dr. Hall asked Ms. Maynard, to highlight key points from the report regarding both the grant writer and the grant program. He said this will the Council to provide feedback more effectively on this topic. He said the OSP will need to make a presentation at our next meeting. Any questions on the grants or grant writer?

UVI – Local Food and Farm Council Fund:

- Dr. Hall commented on the funding for the Local Food and Farm Council. He said that there needs to be confirmation if this funding went through the OSP. He stated that achievements, such as hiring an administrator, holding meetings, establishing infrastructure (website, email), and paying honoraria to honorary members, should be documented. Dr. Hall pointed out that we've accomplished a lot as a Council and need to spell it out.
- Dr. Hall stated that Attorney Thomas Griffith has been tasked to lead the creation of the Local Food and Farm Fund. He said that a report is needed on her progress, particularly on applying for 501(c)(3) status to obtain funds. He asked Ms. Maynard to reach out to Attorney Thomas Griffith and copy him on the communication.
- Dr. Hall went on to discuss the achievements of the Council, such as the Local Food Symbol, Sticker Distributions, and Data Collection. He also mentioned that the allotted fund of \$13,000 includes a Grant Writer. Regarding the data collection, Dr. Hall stated that the ECC has lost its director, who used to provide reports. He said we need to reach out to the Interim Director for an update on their surveys. He will obtain the Interim Director's contact information so that we can reach out.
- Dr. Olive asked if the ECC Survey is still ongoing. **Dr. Hall responded that we would work to get the status of the surveys.**
- Dr. Angeli said that she believes the survey is still ongoing because they sent a representative to the Fisher meetings this week.

VII. Other Business

- Dr. Olive commented that on the subcommittee for the Business Model and Plan Development (Ag Plan Task Force), the need to promote organic and regenerative agricultural businesses was discussed. He said that this wasn't included in the final report. Dr. Olive inquired if there is an opportunity to revise that section to include a system for sustainable food production? He further asked if the Senate Budget Hearing could be a time to present this idea or would be another opportunity to make additions to the Plan.
 - Dr. Hall responded that sustainability is included in the Agriculture Plan. He stated that it is important to emphasize this, evidenced by its inclusion in the Public-Private Investment Fund Application. However, funding was not provided specifically for sustainability, as many items in the plan were underfunded. He said that if we want to request additional funding, it must come to the Council first. Dr. Hall pointed out to Dr. Olive that if he feels strongly about this, he should propose a detailed plan and funding needs. The Council must discuss and support this before I can present it to the legislature, to have a unified voice for funding requests.
- Dr. Hall provided an outline for the upcoming Testimony required for the Senate Budget Hearings. He emphasized the importance of having a compelling written testimony, detailing accomplishments with current funding and highlighting impactful stories from farmers and fishers. He stressed the need for Council members to share observations and impacts for inclusion in the testimony. Additionally, Dr. Hall highlighted the council's decision to expand to include fishers, emphasizing the importance of making this known to the legislature. He mentioned the upcoming hearing will be held in St. Croix and encouraged Council members to be present for moral support and to answer potential questions. Regarding future funding requests, Dr. Hall urged Council members to consider programs needing continuation or additional funding. He suggested reviewing areas needing funding adjustments or new initiatives not initially covered in the plan.
 - Dr. Olive raised a question about honorariums for subcommittee work and Senate attendance.
 - Dr. Hall clarified that official Council meetings were covered, and attendance at the hearing could be argued as an official request. He noted the importance of tracking and justifying any allocated funds.
 - Dr. Hall concluded by suggesting further discussion on the testimony at upcoming meetings to refine and finalize the details before the July deadlines.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

IX. Next Meeting

The following virtual LFFC meeting will be held **on Friday, June 28, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.**