



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes for Workshop Session III

January 24, 2025

Location		Members Present	Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		10	3	9:05 a.m.	10:37 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. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE)Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI)Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green LivingVIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and InstructionHonorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz FarmHonorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston LedeeDirector, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts (AgBC)					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI)Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – CommissionerDPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and WildlifeDPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, FisheriesHonorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed FarmHonorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel MaldonadoDirector of Sustainability: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition					
Support Partners (UVI OSP and Thorn Run Partners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dr. Rick Nader, Vice President for Research and Economic DevelopmentDr. Jessica Venable, Partner – Thorn Run PartnersDr. Ali Mohamed – Consultant / Retired Director Environmental Systems / National Institute of Agriculture (NIFA) USDA					

I. Call to Order

Dr. Petersen called the first meeting of 2025 to order at 9:05 a.m.

II. Opening Remarks, Attendance, and Agenda Overview

- Dr. Petersen extended a warm welcome to all members and guests. He acknowledged that Co-Chair Dr. George, and Ms. Meadows were absent with an advance excuse.
- Dr. Petersen provided an overview of the agenda, highlighting the presentation from LFFC Support Partners: UVI Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) and Thorn Run Partners.

III. Presentation Overview 1: TAP Initiative Update: Strengthening Grant-Writing Capacity for Ag. Development

Dr. Nader provided an update on the Technical Assistance Program (TAP), which focuses on building capacity for securing extramural funding to support agricultural development in the Virgin Islands. He acknowledged the contributions of local stakeholders in helping Thorn Run Partners better understand the territorial agricultural landscape and introduced Dr. Jess Venable and Dr. Ali Mohamed, who are key contributors to the program.

Program Progress

Dr. Venable summarized the team's accomplishments over the past year, which include the following: Site visits to St. Croix and St. Thomas, Grantsmanship workshops targeting the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA), and a presentation on the Food-Water Nexus

She emphasized the urgent need for increased grant-writing capacity, highlighting that 97% of the Virgin Islands' food is imported, making the region vulnerable to economic shocks and food security risks.

Proposed Pilot Programs

To address these challenges, Thorn Run Partners introduced two pilot programs:

1. TAP Fellows Program

- A leadership development initiative selecting two individuals from the TAP Working Group to receive advanced training in:
 - Grant-seeking
 - Project management
 - Stakeholder engagement
- These fellows will serve as grant catalysts, mentoring others and bridging institutions.
- Each fellow will receive a one-year honorarium of \$15,000.

2. TAP Grants Academy

- A structured training program designed to expand grant-writing skills among a broader group of agricultural stakeholders, including:
 - Nonprofits
 - Farmers
 - Agribusinesses
- This program builds on the Grant Writing Boot Camp conducted at UVI in November and will incorporate:
 - Instruction
 - Mentorship
 - Hands-on practice

Implementation Strategy

The TAP Grants Academy will be implemented in three phases:

- **Phase 1** – Foundational training for the TAP Working Group
- **Phase 2** – Expansion of training to nonprofits, farmers, and businesses
- **Phase 3** – Development of a sustainable mentorship network, where Academy graduates become trainers for future participants

The goal is to strengthen long-term grant-seeking capabilities, ensuring sustained access to agricultural funding and greater food security for the Virgin Islands.

IV. Presentation Overview 2: Clarifications on TAP Fellows Program and Grant Training Structure

Dr. Nader clarified the distinctions between the TAP Fellows Program and the TAP Grants Academy:

- The TAP Working Group is open to volunteers, and all members will receive training through the TAP Grants Academy.
- The TAP Fellows Program will select two individuals from the working group to receive stipends and specialized leadership training.
- The program is focused on federal grants for agricultural capacity building, not business development. Farmers seeking business support should consult the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Dr. Mohamed emphasized the importance of securing grant funding to achieve TAP goals, given the territory's limited financial resources. He noted:

- Effective grant-seeking requires manpower and expertise from VIDA and UVI.
- Clear objectives and coordination among stakeholders are essential.
- Currently, no one is assigned responsibility for specific TAP goals, which TAP Fellows will address by providing structure, accountability, and leadership.

Dr. Mohamed underscored that while volunteers are valuable, sustained progress requires trained individuals with defined responsibilities. The fellows will lead coordination efforts, engage stakeholders, and drive grant-seeking initiatives forward.

V. Presentation Overview 3: Q&A: TAP Working Group Engagement and Meeting Coordination

Discussion Points:

- **TAP Working Group Composition:** Dr. Nader explained that the group comprises 15 to 20 volunteers from various sectors, including UVI, VIDA, and nonprofits.
- **Farmer Representation:** In response to Mr. Creque's inquiry, Dr. Nader confirmed that farmers are likely involved, but he would verify specifics.
- **Communication Gaps:** Mr. Creque expressed concerns about the lack of follow-up on meeting requests with TAP leadership, which have been pending since August 2024.
- **Prior Meeting Attempts:**
 - Dr. Mohamed clarified that a meeting was scheduled with Olive, but due to unforeseen circumstances, he could not attend.
 - Dr. Olive confirmed that power outages prevented him from joining the previously scheduled meeting but expressed willingness to reschedule.
 - Mr. Creque stressed the need for better outreach efforts and noted that he had not been contacted personally.
 - Dr. Nader requested Mr. Creque's contact information and promptly committed to arranging a meeting.
 - Dr. Olive reiterated his interest in moving forward with discussions.

VI. Meeting Minutes: December 6, 2024

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

VII. STT Event Debriefing: 26th Annual Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agriculture & Culture Vegan Food Fair

Dr. Petersen introduced the debriefing on the recent Agricultural Fair, where the Local Food and Farm Council (LFFC) participated alongside the Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Business Center. He invited Ms. Roberts, one of the two Council members in attendance, to share insights.

Event Highlights & Impact

- **High Visibility & Engagement** – LFFC's booth was well-positioned along the entrance walkway, attracting significant inquiries about agricultural services.
- **New Client Acquisitions** – Ms. Roberts met with an existing client and signed up a new client at the event.
- **Strong Public Outreach** – LFFC was featured in newspapers and live-streamed by Dara Cooper, increasing awareness.

Recommendations for this Events

- **Extend Participation** – Representation on both days would maximize outreach, given that day 2 has more participants.
- **Expand Marketing Materials** – Additional funding is needed for more grant and loan resources.
- **Explore Revenue Opportunities** – Attendees expressed interest in purchasing LFFC-branded tote bags, highlighting a potential fundraising avenue.

VIII. STX Event Planning: Agriculture & Food Fair of the US Virgin Islands (AgriFest)

Dr. Petersen encouraged members to sign up to volunteer to 'man' the booth for this event. He said members can coordinate their availability with Ms. Maynard to create a flexible schedule, with shifts ranging from 2-3 hours.

IX. Open Discussion

• *Review of Meeting Schedule and Format:*

- The Council agreed to maintain a bi-weekly meeting schedule as the 2025 General Meeting was presented.
- Dr. Adamu inquired about the frequency, and Mr. Wickrema, Dr. Olive, and Dr. Petersen supported bi-weekly meetings for efficiency.
- For meetings that fall on a holiday, it was agreed that the Council will monitor and decide on potential adjustments closer as those dates approach (April 18, May 2, and November 28).

X. New Business and Key Updates

• *Strategic Planning for 2025 Initiatives:*

- Dr. Olive emphasized the need for a structured timeline to track key initiatives, including grants, curriculum development, and education programs. Dr. Petersen agreed, proposing the next meeting focus on finalizing objectives and structuring the annual plan.

- **Action Item:** The next meeting will include a dedicated session to refine and align the Council's 2025 strategic initiatives.
- **Funding and Budget Updates:**
 - Director Biggs confirmed that no additional government funding has been received. Dr. Petersen noted previous OMB funding requests were denied, leaving the Council in limbo. Director Biggs and Dr. Petersen will schedule a meeting with OMB to clarify the status and explore alternative funding options. Additionally, a legislative amendment secured by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory has reallocated funds to support Council initiatives, with disbursement pending.
 - **Action Item:** Dr. Petersen and Director Biggs to meet with OMB to ensure budget approvals.
- **Public Meeting on Farmers' Market Development:**
 - Dr. Petersen shared that in a conversation with Senator Milton Potter, he has requested a collaboration with the Council and his office. This request is to host a joint public forum with farmers and fishers to gather input on a proposed new market facility in St. Thomas.
 - **Action Item:** The Council recommended a hybrid format for broader accessibility and suggested February 11, 2025, at 6 PM as the meeting date and time. The venue (potentially UVI's administrative or conference center) will be secured, and a flyer and outreach plan will be developed.
- **Agricultural Curriculum Development & Research Collaborations:**
 - Dr. Adamu updated the Council on agreements with BVI H. Lavity Stoutt Community College and potential collaborations with Eastern Caribbean institutions. Additionally, Penn State researchers expressed interest in partnering with UVI on agricultural education and market development.
 - **Action Items:** Dr. Adamu will facilitate introductions between UVI and Penn State and explore curriculum expansion that is aligned with research and workforce needs.
- **Small Business Support & Technical Assistance Grants:**
 - Ms. Roberts inquired about available SBDC grants for farmers. Director Biggs confirmed an open RFP for hiring technical assistance providers, with interested parties required to apply before the deadline.
 - **Action Items:** Ms. Roberts will follow up with Director Biggs and promote SBDC grant opportunities to eligible farmers and agribusinesses.
- **Agricultural Processing Centers:**
 - Director Biggs shared that the VI EDA is developing agricultural processing centers on St. Thomas and St. Croix to support value-added product development, food safety training, and farm-to-table culinary experiences. A new facility in Frederiksted has been purchased for this purpose.
 - **Action Items:** Director Biggs will keep the Council updated on project milestones and identify opportunities for collaboration on value-added agriculture initiatives.

XI. Adjournment

- Ms. Roberts moved to adjourn the meeting, with Mr. Creque seconding the motion.
- There being no objections, the motion was carried, and the meeting was formally adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

XII. Next Meeting

- The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, February 7, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.