



# Local Food and Farm Council

## Meeting Minutes

April 25, 2025

Location		No. of Attendees	No. of Presenter(s)	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		7	0	10:07 a.m.	11:07 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"><li>Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE)</li><li>Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI)</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm</li><li>Director, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts (AgBC)</li><li>State Sustainability Director: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)</li><li>LFFC Support Partner: Dr. Rick Nader, Vice President for Research and Economic Development</li></ul>					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI)</li><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</li><li>VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction</li><li>VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living</li><li>DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries</li><li>DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm</li><li>Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee</li><li>Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado</li><li>Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition</li></ul>					

### I. Call to Order, Opening Remarks, Attendance, and Agenda Overview

- Dr. Petersen called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.
- Dr. Petersen convened the meeting and thanked members for adjusting their schedules. He noted the importance of maintaining communication and continuity, even if the meeting would be brief.

### II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

#### Meeting Minutes of April 4, 2025

- Due to all members not having an opportunity to review the minutes of April 4, 2025, before the meeting, it was agreed that the approval of the minutes would be deferred to the next meeting.

### III. Presentation: Role of Thorn Run Partners (TRP) in Grant Review Process

Dr. Nader shared information regarding TRP and how they can support the Council's grant review process for Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund applications. He outlined three potential engagement levels for TRP:

- Light engagement to identify subject matter experts (SMEs).
- Medium engagement to structure the grant review process.
- Full engagement to organize and manage the review, including compensation logistics.

Dr. Nader proposed that compensation would be \$75–\$150 per application, with additional remuneration for panel participation. He committed to following up with TRP regarding feasibility within their scope of work.

- Dr. Adamu expressed support for involving TRP, citing increased credibility due to their independence.
- Dr. Petersen noted that the existing internal review process had worked effectively the prior year, with anonymized applications and a dual-stage review structure.
- Dr. Nader agreed that the current model could remain intact, with TRP contributing primarily to identifying expert reviewers if needed.
- The Council agreed to allow Dr. Nader to initiate non-binding discussions with TRP regarding the grant review process; however, all options would need to be evaluated to determine the best way forward for finalizing the grant review process.

#### **IV. Reflections on April 16, 2025, Senate Hearing**

Dr. Petersen requested feedback from Council members at the recent Senate hearing before the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture. Dr. Adamu and Dr. Olive commended Dr. Petersen's testimony, emphasizing the challenges and proposed solutions for local agriculture.

- Dr. Olive proposed reviving a farm-to-table certification subcommittee to help distinguish authentic Virgin Islands producers.
- Several members emphasized the urgency of supporting agritourism and farm-to-table initiatives and noted farmers' economic challenges and the role of such programs in sustaining operations.

#### **V. Open Discussion**

##### **5A. Council Coordination and Funding Status**

- Mr. Creque voiced concerns about repeated delays and the lack of tangible action over the past two decades. He highlighted issues such as deteriorating infrastructure (e.g., farm roads), poor inter-agency coordination, and funding shortfalls.
- Ms. Roberts echoed these concerns, noting that limited staffing and fragmented implementation of the Agricultural Plan have hindered progress.

##### **5B. Available Programs – TRP Initiatives**

- Dr. Nader reintroduced the TAP Fellowship as a stopgap initiative to assign thematic leads for food security projects, acknowledging that this measure does not replace the legislatively mandated coordinator role.
- Dr. Olive emphasized the importance of hiring a full-time coordinator, as intended by statute, and stated that reliance on short-term fellowships should not deter the Council from advocating for full funding and staffing.

##### **5C. Update on Legislative and Budgetary Barriers**

- Dr. Petersen reported that both the Council and the Business Center had not received their FY25 allotments. A legislative oversight had resulted in funding misallocation, with a necessary amendment to redirect the \$383,000 to the Department of Agriculture remaining incomplete. This administrative error has delayed the release of critical funds, stalling Council operations and hiring.

#### **VI. New Business**

Dr. Petersen encouraged members to prepare for upcoming public meetings related to agritourism and policy updates. He asked members to maintain momentum while structural and funding challenges are being addressed.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

- Dr. Olive moved to adjourn the meeting, and the motion was seconded by Dr. Usman.
- There being no further discussion, the meeting was officially adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

#### **VIII. Next Meeting**

Due to the impending holiday, it was agreed that the next virtual LFFC meeting would be held on Friday, May 16, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.