



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

July 11, 2025

Location		No. of Attendees	No. of Presenter(s)	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		8	0	9:11 a.m.	10:30 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 of Agriculture (UVI)Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry FarmState Sustainability Director: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)Director, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts (AgBC)Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE)Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI)Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – CommissionerVIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and InstructionVIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green LivingDPNR 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 Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz FarmHonorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston LedeeHonorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel MaldonadoDr. Rick Nader, Vice President for Research and Economic DevelopmentAssistant to State Sustainability Director: Sumayah Milan Bryan					

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

- The meeting was called to order at 9:11 a.m. by Dr. Petersen, Co-chair.
- Dr. Petersen thanked members for their attendance. He noted that a quorum had not been met at the start of the meeting. Accordingly, it was agreed to proceed with the agenda and discussion, but no formal decisions would be made until quorum was achieved.

II. 2024 Grantee Site Visit Proposal Presentation: Sommer Sibilly-Brown

Overview of Presentation:

- Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown, Founder and Executive Director of Virgin Islands Good Food, presented a comprehensive proposal for conducting site visits to the 2024 Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF) grantees. The primary goals of the initiative are to assess the progress of funded projects, provide hands-on technical assistance, and gather impact data for both internal review and public accountability.
- Key components of the proposal included:
 - Site Visit Schedule:** Four-day visits in each district—St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix.
 - Visit Structure:** Two farm visits per day to encourage and accommodate participation by Council members.

- **Visit Format:** Each site visit will span approximately 90 to 120 minutes and will include a walkthrough of the farm, on-site documentation, photography, and oral reporting to reduce barriers for farmers who may find written reports challenging.
- **Reporting Deliverables:** A comprehensive internal report and a visually engaging, public-facing infographic summarizing outcomes and impacts.
- **Budget:** A proposed budget of \$7,138 includes optional travel costs such as airfare and car rental, depending on the district.
- **Purpose:** Ms. Sibilly-Brown noted this initiative serves as a transitional measure until a formal Coordinator is hired and emphasized the importance of documenting success stories to support advocacy for future funding.

Council Feedback and Discussion:

- Council members provided feedback and raised important considerations, including:
 - **Coordinator Role Clarification:** There was a discussion regarding whether the proposal fills a temporary gap and does not replace the need for a full-time Coordinator.
 - **Neutrality in Evaluation:** Dr. Usman Adamu recommended that Council members refrain from joining the site visits to preserve objectivity and ensure independent evaluation.
 - **Alternative Documentation Options:** Dr. Olive suggested allowing grantees to submit photos or reports in cases where site visits are not feasible, particularly for seasonal operations or shared equipment.
 - **Visual Evidence and Branding:** Members supported collecting grantee-submitted photographs, including before-and-after shots and images of equipment in use, for use in reports. They also recommended affixing branded stickers to purchased equipment to increase program visibility.
 - **Timeline Sensitivity:** It was noted that delivering results in time for legislative testimony was a high priority, despite the lack of a confirmed budget hearing date.

Action:

- The proposal was approved by a majority vote, with one member in opposition. Ms. Sibilly-Brown will revise it to reflect Council feedback and begin awardee outreach and scheduling preparations.

III. Approval of Minutes: June 13, 2025, and June 27, 2025

- Following confirming a quorum, Dr. Petersen presented the meeting minutes of **June 13, 2025**, and **June 27, 2025**, for approval.

Correction Noted:

- Director Roberts identified a clarification regarding the June 27, 2025, meeting minutes. She noted that while the summary attributed to her regarding “the growing expectations placed on Council members and the pressing need for dedicated funding and administrative support” was accurate, she believed that Dr. Olive had originally made the statement. She supported the message and acknowledged its importance, but suggested the attribution be corrected to reflect Dr. Olive’s contribution.

Actions:

- **Motion:** A motion to approve the June 13 and June 27 meeting minutes, with the correction noted by Director Roberts, was made by Dr. Olive and seconded by Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown.
- **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously, with noted corrections. There were no objections or abstentions.

IV. Legislative and Funding Updates:

1. Legislative Meeting Update

- Dr. Petersen informed the Council that he has been invited and scheduled to appear before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Economic Development on November 10, 2025, to provide updates on the Council’s performance and activities. He said this is not a formal budget hearing but a review of the Council’s performance. The formal invitation will be shared with all members.

2. PPPIF Funding Update

- Director Wayne Biggs confirmed that the \$500,000 allocation from Act 8918 has not yet been received. He shared that a \$15,000 check returned from Jaime Kennedy (JP Roots Farm) is now available for reallocation.

3. Compensation for Honorary Member Participation in Subcommittee Meetings

- Dr. Petersen reopened discussion on whether honorary members should be compensated for their participation in subcommittee meetings, and he referenced Act 8716, Section 8, which supports compensation for official business.

- Dr. Petersen and Director Biggs expressed that subcommittee meetings should be considered official business.
- Director Biggs recommended that government employees, including UVI personnel, be excluded from this compensation policy due to their salaried roles.

Motion and Vote:

- The motion was made by Director Biggs and seconded by Director Roberts.
- The motion to compensate honorary members for subcommittee participation was unanimously approved, with no objections or abstentions.

V. Appreciation Gift

- Dr. Petersen revisited a previously discussed agenda item regarding a gift item to Dr. Hall, recognizing his contributions. However, the initiative was tabled as Dr. Hall was off-island then. It was agreed that Dr. Hall will be presented with a Farm Box. Dr. Olive volunteered to coordinate the gift through the collective farm box program and will manage the shipping logistics; farm boxes are shipped weekly to St. Thomas and St. John. The pickup window in St. Thomas is Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., at Hotel 1829. Dr. Petersen requested that any associated cost to the Council be shared with Ms. Maynard for processing.
- **Action:** There were no objections to the proposal, and all present supported moving forward with the gift as planned.

VI. Open Discussion

6a. Future Farmers of America (FFA) - Reactivation

- **Dr. Petersen** shared that the FFA program must be reactivated through the Catalyst platform, which requires credit card payment. As the Council does not have a credit card, he will cover the cost personally and submit the receipt for reimbursement. Ms. Cydney Meadows will assist with coordinating the application to ensure proper submission

6b. Agriculture Business Center – Upcoming Tree Workshop Series

- **Director Roberts** provided an update on the upcoming hands-on **Tree Planting Workshop**, scheduled for July 12, at 3:30 p.m. at the Department of Agriculture’s Rudolph Schulerbrandt Agriculture Complex in Estate Lower Love, St. Croix. Mr. Chichester will lead the session and focus on proper tree planting techniques.
 - The workshop series will continue on St. Thomas on the 19th, with a similar focus on best practices for planting and maintaining trees. Director Roberts also shared that she is particularly seeking healthy 2–3 ft. Frangipani tree to be planted on the UVI campus in St. Thomas as part of the event.
 - Director Roberts also noted that the Ag Business Center is planning additional outreach events and workshops to engage the community further.

6c. Agro-Processing and Technology Center

- **Director Biggs** announced the successful acquisition of the Padilla building in Frederiksted, which will serve as the site for the new Agro-Processing and Technology Center. This dedicated space will support the development of local agribusiness through the following planned components:
 - Two clean/test kitchens for value-added product development
 - A farm-to-table, event-based restaurant space
 - A technology center focused on agribusiness innovation and support
 - A complementary facility on St. Thomas is also being explored, with the Marcelli School in Savan considered a potential site.
- Director Biggs shared that funding has been allocated for renovations, and additional grant opportunities are actively pursued. A Council site visit to the Padilla Building was suggested for a future date.

Discussion:

- **Mr. Creque** commended the initiative and the Department’s commitment to developing agricultural infrastructure. He encouraged the inclusion of dehydration equipment in the new facility to expand processing capabilities and extend product shelf life. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of ensuring the Center serves local farmers directly, rather than focusing exclusively on food entrepreneurs or external vendors.
 - Director Biggs acknowledged the recommendation and expressed appreciation for the feedback. He confirmed that the goal is to build a facility supporting farmers and food-based entrepreneurs. That equipment selection and programming will be guided by input from stakeholders across the agricultural community.

6d. Farm-to-School Innovation Grant

- **Ms. Sibilly-Brown** announced that Virgin Islands Good Food, in partnership with Boise State University, has been awarded a 3-year, \$990,000 grant to support farm-to-school innovation in the territory. The grant focuses on developing value-added fruit products, such as dehydrated mango, and natural juices, for integration into local school food systems. She stated further that the initiative has already secured support from the Virgin Islands Department of Education, and its overarching goal is to reintroduce locally grown fruits into school nutrition programs, promoting healthier options for students while strengthening local agriculture.

6e. Local Food Labeling & Authenticity

- **Dr. Olive** emphasized the critical need for an authentic local food identification program to protect the integrity of locally grown products and support Virgin Islands farmers. He proposed that the Agro-Processing and Technology Center be a flagship site for implementing and promoting a local certification system. Mr. Olive also recommended that the subcommittee focused on this initiative continue its work, as consistent labeling and branding are essential to consumer trust. He cautioned against the practice of “farm-washing,” where imported goods are falsely marketed as local, and urged for measures to prevent such misrepresentation.

Discussion:

- **Dr. Petersen** acknowledged the concern and shared that during National Farmers Market Week (August 3–9), the Department of Agriculture (DOA) will implement updates to market layouts to ensure a clear visual distinction between locally grown and imported products, helping consumers make informed choices.

6f. Marketing Campaign: Council Branding / “Virgin Fresh”

- **Director Biggs and Dr. Petersen** led a discussion on the potential integration of the Department of Agriculture’s “Virgin Fresh” campaign with the Local Food and Farm Council’s branding efforts. While “Virgin Fresh” is more widely recognized, concerns about the limited visibility and public awareness of the Council’s “current” branding were raised. They both acknowledged the importance of a unified, recognizable marketing strategy to promote local agriculture and food systems. There was consensus to explore ways to align or merge both campaigns to improve public engagement, clarity, and overall impact.

6g. Cannabis Advisory Board Inquiries

- **Mr. Creque** posed several questions regarding the structure and policies of the Cannabis Advisory Board, to which Dr. Petersen provided the following responses:
 - **Can Advisory Board members apply for licenses?**
No. Members of the Advisory Board are prohibited from applying for licenses while serving and must wait 12 months after leaving the board before becoming eligible.
 - **Are there term limits for board members?**
Yes, there are term limits, but they are not currently enforced due to ongoing recruitment challenges.
 - **Is board service compensated?**
Yes. Advisory Board members receive compensation on a per-meeting basis. Further details are available on the Office of Cannabis Regulations (OCR) website.

IX. Adjournment

- With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.
- Dr. Petersen thanked members for their participation and commitment.

X. Next Meeting

- The next LFFC General Meeting is scheduled for **Friday, July 25, 2025**, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Minutes Correction Record

Meeting Date of Original Minutes:	July 11, 2025
Correction Noted By:	Dr. Usman Adamu
Correction:	Dr. Petersen's name was incorrectly listed as both present and absent. His status should be updated to 'Present.' Additionally, the department abbreviation for Dr. Petersen was incorrectly listed as 'VIDE' and should be corrected to 'VIDA.'
Motion:	Dr. Adamu moved to approve July 11, 2025, meeting minutes with the corrections.
Second:	Dr. Nate Olive seconded the motion.
Vote:	The motion carried with no objections. Dr. George and Mr. Wickrema abstained from voting, noting they were not in attendance.
Final Action:	The July 11, 2025, minutes were approved as amended, with the corrections noted, in the general meeting on July 25, 2025, general meeting.