



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

July 25, 2025

Location		No. of Attendees	No. of Presenter(s)	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		8	0	9:11 a.m.	10:35 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. Safiya George – President (UVI)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)Dr. Rick Nader, Vice President for Research and Economic Development					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDA)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 MaldonadoLocal Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition ProgramAssistant 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. George, Co-chair.
- Dr. George noted that a quorum was not yet established at the start of the meeting. As such, it was agreed that the Council would proceed with agenda updates and discussion items, but no formal actions or decisions would be taken until a quorum was met.
- Approval of the previous meeting's minutes was temporarily deferred to allow voting members time to join.

II. QUARTERLY UPDATE: Director Shanta Roberts – Agriculture Business Center

Director Roberts delivered a detailed report on the current quarter's activities at the Agriculture Business Center. She announced that five new clients were onboarded, increasing the total number of active clients to 24. The Center continues to mentor and support farmers and fishers across the territory.

Director Roberts highlighted several strengthened partnerships that have enhanced the Center's programming, including collaborations with the Department of Education, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico's Agricultural Experiment Station (to offer bilingual workshops), the SBA Veterans Business Outreach Program, the Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance, the Virgin Islands Network of Environmental Educators, and the Department of Agriculture.

During the quarter, the Center hosted five educational events: two webinars, two workshops, and one outreach session, with 85 participants. It also supported client applications for significant funding opportunities, including the USDA's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grant and the RAFI-Kurgan Infrastructure Grant, which was awarded to one client.

Despite the delay in receiving FY2024 funding, the Center remained operational. FY2025 funding was received in June, allowing plans to move forward. A potential advisor has been identified to provide in-person support at the St. Thomas office, expanding the Center's presence on St. Thomas and St. John.

Director Roberts stated that ideally, the Center would employ three advisors and two administrative staff to fulfill its mission more effectively. However, due to financial constraints and the need to address FY2024 obligations, the immediate focus will be hiring one advisor to provide territory-wide, on-the-ground service.

Discussion:

- Members commended Ms. Roberts for her dedication and the significant impact she has made as a solo staff member.
- Mr. Creque praised her tireless efforts and encouraged hiring an equally committed advisor on St. Thomas as a meaningful first step.
- Members agreed with Ms. Roberts' strategy to prioritize field-level engagement over administrative support, affirming the importance of face-to-face relationships with farmers and fishers in advancing the Center's mission.

III. Approval of Minutes: June 11, 2025

- Upon confirming a quorum, Dr. George presented the meeting minutes of July 11, 2025, for review and approval.

Correction Noted:

- Dr. Adamu identified that there needs to be a correction. He noted that Dr. Petersen's name had been incorrectly listed as both present and absent. His status should be updated to "Present." Additionally, the department abbreviation for Dr. Petersen was listed as "VIDE" and should be corrected to "VIDA."

Actions:

- **Motion:** Dr. Adamu moved to approve the July 11, 2025, meeting minutes with the corrections, which Dr. Olive seconded.
- **Vote:** The motion was carried out with no objections. Dr. George and Mr. Wickrema abstained from voting, noting they were not in attendance.

IV. Legislative and Funding Updates:

1. Senate Budget Hearing

- Dr. George informed that the Council has been invited to provide testimony before the Senate Budget and Finance Committee on August 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at the Legislature in St. Croix. The Council has been allotted 10 minutes to deliver its remarks. Members were advised that participation may be flexible, and they may attend in person in St. Croix, from the St. Thomas Legislature, or remotely. Dr. George, Director Roberts, and Mr. Harith confirmed their availability to participate in the testimony. Dr. George encouraged any additional members who may be available to notify Ms. Maynard, herself, or Dr. Petersen to ensure their names are added to the participation list.

2. Act 8918 Agricultural Plan Funding (Bill No. 35-0378)

- Dr. George provided an overview of the Council's funding status. She confirmed that the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) has received all funds allocated under Bill No. 35-0378, including the \$250,000 designated for the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) to support grant writing and capacity-building for local farmers and fishers.
- Director Roberts confirmed that the Agriculture Business Center received its FY2025 allotment in June, enabling forward movement on staffing and service expansion.
- Director Biggs noted that the \$500,000 allotment to fund the PPPIF Grant Program has not yet been received. Outreach with OMB regarding the status is ongoing.

V. Outreach: EcoVida Enterprises and Composting Discussion

- Dr. George informed the Council that EcoVida Enterprises, a private-sector company focused on organic waste repurposing and energy production, has formally contacted the Local Food and Farm Council to request a meeting. The company seeks a written endorsement to support its proposal to the VI Waste Management Authority (VIWMA). As a result, EcoVida is scheduled to present its initiative to the Council at the August 22, 2025, general meeting. Dr. George noted that Dr. Petersen supports this meeting and the proposed initiative, and a snapshot of EcoVida's introductory materials was shared in the chat for members to preview ahead of the presentation.

- Following the update, Mr. Wickrema raised concerns about VIWMA’s consideration of Air Curtain Incineration (ACI) as a method for disposing of green and brown waste, despite existing legislation from December 2017 that prohibits such practices. He emphasized the ecological and agricultural value of this organic material, commonly referred to as “black gold,” and urged the Council to formally oppose incineration while continuing to advocate for composting as a sustainable and legally sound alternative.

VI. Seeds of Security Program Overview: Director Cydney Meadows – VI Department of Education

Director Meadows summarized the department’s ongoing efforts to integrate agriculture into the school curriculum. The team has adopted the National Agriculture Literacy Outcomes for grades K–6 and the ANFR Virgin Islands edition for grades 7–12, with materials currently being ordered to support instruction. Key initiatives include a practicum on the flora and fauna of the Virgin Islands, capstone projects focused on value-added agricultural products, and student participation in events such as the Ag Fair, Eco Fair, and Mango Melee. These programs are supported through collaboration with the Agriculture Business Center and partners in Puerto Rico.

At the school level, grow bags, seed kits, and irrigation supplies have been distributed to Charlotte Amalie High School, Ken School, and Sprout. There are also plans to preserve existing greenhouses, develop aquaponics systems, and reestablish garden and manners clubs. Additional grow bags and containers will be provided for the relocation of the Julius E. Sprauve School. Director Meadows also introduced an educational game called “Farm Life,” which combines math and writing skills to teach agricultural economics. The department is also exploring integrating artificial intelligence and smart technology into its agriculture programs.

Discussion:

- Mr. Wickrema proposed creating a student-led agriculture newsletter to showcase activities across the territory. He offered financial support through Planet Green Force, with additional assistance from Island Green. He suggested that Mr. Creque and Dr. Olive regularly contribute to the newsletter. Director Meadows agreed to lead the initiative.

VII. Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) Overview: Dr. Rick Nader – VP for Research and Economic Development - UVI

Dr. Nader provided an update on ongoing grant initiatives managed by the Office of Sponsored Programs. He reported that finalists for the TAP Fellowship have been selected, with interviews scheduled in the coming weeks. These fellows will receive training from Thorn Run Partners, a consulting firm with expertise in agriculture-related funding and grant writing, to strengthen local capacity in securing external funding.

In addition, a territory-wide agricultural grant academy is planned for launch in August. This academy will be open to farmers, fishers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders interested in pursuing agricultural grants. In the meantime, OSP continues offering one-on-one and group consultations to provide support as needed.

VIII. VI Agricultural Plan – Implementation Tracker

Dr. George introduced the Ag Plan Implementation Tracker for review. She emphasized the importance of keeping it current to reflect on the Council’s progress toward fulfilling the mandates outlined in the Agricultural Plan. The tracker is a central reference point for capturing key updates and cross-agency efforts. Following member reports, several updates were identified for inclusion. Ms. Maynard will revise to include Director Meadows’ update on curriculum adoption and youth agriculture initiatives led by the Department of Education. She will also reflect Dr. Nader’s report on the TAP Fellowship and territory-wide grant academy under the University’s efforts. Updates regarding staffing activity at the Department of Agriculture will be incorporated pending formal input from Dr. Petersen. Additionally, previous updates from Director Biggs concerning the Grant Matching Fund and Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF) will be added.

Action Item:

- Ms. Maynard must update the tracker regularly and circulate the revised version. Dr. George reminded members to review their respective areas and send any new developments or corrections to ensure the tracker remains a reliable planning and reporting tool.

IX. Adjournment

- With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

X. Next Meeting

- The next LFFC General Meeting is scheduled for **Friday, August 8, 2025**, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Minutes Correction Record

Meeting Date of Original Minutes:	July 25, 2025
Correction Noted By:	Director, Shanta Roberts
Correction:	The reference to 'Rafi Cure' was corrected to 'Rafi Rural Advancement Foundation International.'
Motion:	Director Biggs moved to approve the minutes of July 25, 2025, as amended.
Second:	Director Roberts seconded the motion.
Vote:	Approved unanimously, with no opposition.
Final Action:	The July 25, 2025, minutes were approved as amended in the August 8, 2025, general meeting.