



# Local Food and Farm Council

## Meeting Minutes

### October 4, 2024

Location		Members Present	Guest Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		11	2	9:03 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"><li>Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE)</li><li>Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)</li><li>Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI)</li><li>DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife</li><li>VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living</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>Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm</li><li>Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee</li><li>Director, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts</li><li>Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition</li></ul>					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George, – President (UVI)</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>DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries</li><li>Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm</li><li>Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado</li><li>Director of Sustainability: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)</li></ul>					
Guests:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Dr. Jessica Venable, Partner – Thorn Run Partners</li><li>Dr. Ali Mohamed – Consultant / Retired Director Environmental Systems / National Institute of Agriculture (NIFA) USDA</li></ul>					

#### I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Petersen at 9:03 a.m.

#### II. Guest Presentation by Thorn Run Partners: Dr. Jessica Venable and Dr. Ali Mohamed

##### • Overview of Federal Funding Strategies

Dr. Venable and Dr. Mohamed provided a detailed update on federal funding strategies and the ongoing efforts to support the USVI Territorial Agricultural Plan (TAP) implementation. Their presentation focused on securing federal grants and improving stakeholder coordination across the territory.

##### • Communication, Outreach, and Engagement:

Dr. Venable highlighted the challenges in ensuring effective communication between local stakeholders and federal funders. He emphasized the need for improved coordination across different groups in the USVI, including farmers, fishers, and agricultural organizations.

##### • Workshops and Capacity Building:

Dr. Mohamed discussed the workshops and boot camps they have been organizing to build the capacity for grant

writing and application processes. These workshops aim to equip participants with the skills necessary to apply for federal grants, particularly USDA funding opportunities.

- **Grant Writing and Technical Assistance:**

Dr. Venable noted that they have provided technical assistance to various groups, offering support for developing and submitting grant proposals. This includes editing, reviewing, and assisting with the overall process to ensure competitive applications.

#### **Developed Resources**

- **Federal Grants in Agriculture Handbook:**

Dr. Venable announced the creation of a comprehensive handbook, designed to assist stakeholders in navigating federal grant opportunities, particularly USDA programs. The handbook provides best practices and step-by-step guidance for identifying and applying for relevant grants.

- **Working Group Email List:**

A working group email list has been established to streamline communication and inform stakeholders about available funding opportunities, upcoming workshops, and other relevant updates. The list has already helped distribute vital information to interested parties.

- **Grant Proposal Assistance:**

Dr. Mohamed explained how they have assisted with several grant proposals focused on climate-smart agriculture, food waste reduction, and community-based initiatives.

#### **Discussion:**

##### **Communication Challenges**

**Dr. Angeli** raised a concern regarding communication gaps, noting that not all stakeholders, particularly local farmers and fishers, are being reached through the current channels. She suggested better outreach strategies to ensure information about grants and workshops reaches all relevant parties.

- **Response from Dr. Venable:** Dr. Venable agreed that improving outreach is a priority and emphasized that the working group email list is an initial step toward addressing this issue. He added that the team is open to suggestions from Council members to improve communication channels further.
- **Dr. Olive** echoed Dr. Angeli's concerns, stating that farmers often feel disconnected from these opportunities. He suggested more effort be put into direct outreach, perhaps through in-person meetings or leveraging existing farmer networks.
- **Response from Dr. Venable:** Dr. Venable acknowledged the importance of direct engagement and agreed that a more localized approach would be beneficial. He mentioned that the upcoming workshops aim to increase direct interaction with farmers and other stakeholders.

##### **Overlapping Applications and Competition**

**Ms. Selassie** expressed concern about local organizations inadvertently competing for the same federal grants. She pointed out that this internal competition could weaken the territory's overall chances of securing funding. She asked whether there were plans to coordinate efforts more effectively.

- **Response from Dr. Mohamed:** Dr. Mohamed agreed that competition among local organizations for limited grant funding is counterproductive. He suggested creating a central coordination group within the Council to ensure that applications are strategically aligned and to prevent overlap.
- **Ms. Selassie** emphasized the need for an explicit "meta-narrative" that unifies the various proposals under the larger goals of the Territorial Agricultural Plan. This would help present a cohesive case to federal funders and increase the likelihood of receiving larger grants.

##### **Strengthening the Working Group**

**Mr. Wickrema** suggested the need for a more diverse working group that includes more direct input from farmers and fishers. He noted that including these voices would improve the relevance of the funding strategies being pursued and help ensure that grants reflect the needs of the local agricultural community.

- **Response from Dr. Mohamed:** Dr. Mohamed agreed, stating that the inclusion of farmers and fishers would not only help refine the grant application process but also strengthen the narrative about local needs. He encouraged more Council members to reach out to potential participants for the working group.

##### **Upcoming Workshops**

- Dr. Venable and Dr. Mohamed announced a series of upcoming workshops scheduled for November 16th to 20th. These workshops will focus on grant writing, USDA funding opportunities, proposal development, and post-award management. Participants were encouraged to register as soon as the process is finalized.

A potential conflict with other agricultural events scheduled during the same dates was discussed, and the team agreed to explore solutions to avoid overlaps.

### **III. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes (September 20, 2024)**

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

### **IV. Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund Check Disbursement**

- Dr. Petersen provided an update on the status of the Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund disbursements. He reported that all checks had been printed and collected, with the exception of one check awaiting collection from St. John. Additionally, one recipient, Mr. Jamie Kennedy, had declined the award due to his relocation.
- Dr. Petersen reported that the PPPIF subcommittee met to determine the appropriate course of action regarding the unclaimed check. It was agreed that the check would be returned to the Economic Development Authority (EDA) rather than issued to the next candidate, as the subsequent applicants had requested amounts significantly higher than the remaining funds. Issuing the check to these candidates could set them up for failure, given the disparity between their requested amounts and the available funding.

### **V. Proposed Market on the Eastern Side of St. Thomas, VI**

- **Invitation to Senator Milton Potter to attend the LFFC General Meeting**
  - Dr. Petersen also discussed potential farmers' market project funding with Senator Milton Potter. Senator Potter expressed his commitment to supporting the initiative and mentioned that a funding source had been identified. However, the final decision on fund allocation is still being discussed.
- **Farmers Market Expansion**
  - Dr. Petersen reported that he had reached out to Lockhart Realty Group to discuss the possibility of securing acreage for a new farmers' market on St. Thomas, specifically in a commercial area near mid-island. While a response was pending, Lockhart Realty Group indicated they would provide an update before the next meeting.

#### ***Discussion:***

- Mr. Creque supported the idea of expanding farmers' markets but emphasized the need to improve the existing market infrastructure before focusing on new locations. He specifically mentioned the need for better facilities for both farmers and fishers, who rely on these spaces to sell their products.
- Ms. Selassie expressed these concerns, pointing out that current markets are underutilized due to issues with infrastructure and safety. She argued that strengthening existing markets should be a priority before expanding to new locations.
- Dr. Angeli raised the issue of safety and cleanliness in the existing markets, particularly for fishers. She mentioned that illicit activities and lack of proper maintenance in these areas had deterred fishers from using the markets. She stressed the need for better oversight and maintenance to ensure these spaces remain usable and attractive to the local community.

### **VI. Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Procurement Delays**

- Dr. Petersen updated the Council on delays in finalizing the FY 2025 budget. Despite ongoing communication with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Legislature, the Council had not yet received confirmed numbers for its operational budget. He noted that confirmed funding for animal welfare centers had been received, but the Council's overall budget remained uncertain. Additionally, Dr. Petersen informed the Council that the procurement system would be down until November 14th, limiting the ability to submit or procure non-routine items.

### **VII. Open Discussion**

**1.1 Discussion on Meeting Frequency:** Dr. Olive asked whether the Council would continue to meet twice a month or move to a once-a-month schedule. Dr. Petersen clarified that the Council would continue to meet twice a month unless otherwise decided.

**1.2 Next Meeting:** It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on November 8<sup>th</sup> instead of the original November 1st meeting, which conflicts with a public holiday.

**1.3 Senator Potter's Invitation:** Dr. Petersen stated that Senator Milton Potter will be invited to attend the next meeting to provide more details on the funding for the farmers' market and related agricultural initiatives.

**VIII. Adjournment**

The meeting was officially adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

**IX: Next Meeting**

The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, October 18, 2024, at 9:00 a.m., via Zoom.