



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes for Workshop Session I

October 4, 2024

Location		Members Present	Guest Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		9	0	9:02 a.m.	10:33 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)• Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George, – President (UVI)• DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife• VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living• Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm• Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm• Director, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts• Director of Sustainability: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)• Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)• Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner• VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction• DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries• Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)• Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI)• Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm• Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado• Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee• Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm					

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Petersen at 9:02 a.m.

II. Opening Remarks and Workshop Overview

Dr. Petersen welcomed attendees and acknowledged the contributions of **Dr. Nate Olive**, **Director Cydney Meadows**, and **Director Shanta Roberts** and thanked them for their pre-submitted feedback on the 2025 strategies, which served as a foundation for the discussions. He encouraged active participation and open dialogue, stressing that the workshop was intended to refine strategic goals and identify actionable steps for the fiscal year. Each contributor was invited to elaborate on their submissions as the workshop progressed.

III. Workshop Discussions and Key 2025 Strategies for the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan

1. Review of Appropriated Funds - Budgetary Updates:

- **Funding Allocation:** Dr. Petersen reviewed Bill No. 35-0378, which allocates funds for implementing portions of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2025. He highlighted that funding for the Local Food and Farm Coordinator position was not explicitly included, raising concerns about how the role will be financed.
- **Organic Agriculture Initiative Funding:** Dr. Petersen confirmed that funding for organic agriculture had been included, ensuring continued support

for projects promoting organic practices. This funding will primarily focus on education, infrastructure, and compliance support for organic certification.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Dr. Olive:** Emphasized the need to leverage the funding to support local farmers transitioning to organic practices. He suggested using part of the allocation to develop a mentorship program pairing certified organic farmers with those in transition.
- **Ms. Brown:** Proposed integrating organic farming education into the curriculum for schools and community workshops, utilizing the organic funding to increase awareness and participation.
- **Mr. Wickrema:** Recommended hosting workshops and seminars for farmers, focusing on the economic benefits of organic farming and how to achieve certification.

Action Items:

1. Develop a mentorship program to guide farmers through the organic certification process.
2. Allocate funding for workshops and educational materials promoting organic practices.
3. Create a plan to evaluate the impact of organic initiatives, including farmer participation and certification rates.

2. Agricultural Curriculum Development:

Director Meadows discussed developing an open-source, Virgin Islands-specific curriculum to support agricultural education from Pre-K through Grade 13.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Dr. Petersen:**
 - Emphasized the need for measurable, practical outcomes to engage students and align with the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.
 - Stressed the importance of the FFA as a cornerstone for student engagement and agricultural leadership development.
- **Director Meadows:**
 - Advocated for a centralized curriculum that can be adapted locally, highlighting the need for sustainability beyond individual educators.
 - Discussed challenges in charter approvals due to administrative hurdles but confirmed readiness to move forward.
- **Ms. Sibilly-Brown:**
 - Proposed incorporating edible education, where agricultural principles are integrated into subjects like math and science.
 - Highlighted the importance of linking hands-on projects to classroom learning, such as using gardens to teach math concepts like area and perimeter.
- **Dr. Olive:** Shared open-source resources for hands-on learning, such as composting labs, that can serve as templates for local adaptation.
- **Mr. Wickrema:**
 - Suggested integrating FFA activities with the 2025 Agricultural Fair, including competitions and a banquet to showcase student achievements.
 - Proposed hands-on initiatives for the "Seeds of Security Program," which includes gardening competitions such as "biggest crop" and community engagement to build on student engagement initiatives.

Recommendations:

- Organize teacher training to help educators integrate agriculture into existing curricula.
- Engage local stakeholders, including private schools and homeschool networks, to ensure broad adoption.
- Develop Virgin Islands-specific lesson plans for hands-on activities like gardening and conservation.
- Plan a student-led FFA banquet and awards ceremony during the 2025 Agricultural Fair in St. Croix.
- Engage with corporate sponsors to fund FFA activities and awards.
- Partner with local schools to implement gardening projects and other agricultural initiatives.
- Include hands-on learning in broader curriculum development efforts.

Action Items:

1. Convene a curriculum development team to adapt and implement the framework.
2. Identify potential funding sources to support teacher training and curriculum materials.
3. Resolve administrative barriers to FFA charter approval and reinstate the Local FFA Chapter.

4. Develop a timeline for FFA activities leading to the 2025 Agricultural Fair.
5. Launch pilot gardening projects in selected schools.
6. Collaborate with educators to design competitions and award categories.

3. Food and Farm Coordinator Role and Priorities:

- Members stressed the importance of the Coordinator position in driving Council initiatives, aligning strategic goals, and managing day-to-day operations.
- Strong support was expressed for ensuring adequate funding for the role to secure the Council's success.
- **Director Meadows:** Advocated for defining the role's specific tasks to align with Council priorities and funding for the role.
- **Dr. Nate Olive:** Proposed identifying funding from within the FY 2025 appropriations to support the position.
- **Dr. Petersen:** He is actively working with his team and communicating with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to resolve the funding gap. He committed to exploring all possible funding avenues.
- **Ms. Sibilly-Brown:** Recommended developing a project management plan to track the Coordinator's contributions and ensure accountability.

Action Item(s):

1. Clarify funding ambiguity for the Coordinator position and secure funding to support the role through the fiscal year.
2. Pursue alternative funding sources, including grants and sponsorships, to ensure the role's continuity.
3. Outline the Coordinator's role in critical initiatives, such as curriculum development and FFA activities.

4. Next Steps:

- Continue workshop discussions on November 22, 2024, to finalize FY 2025 Priorities.
- Update on the Council's 501(c)(3) status to enable fundraising.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was officially adjourned at 10:33 a.m.

V. Next Meeting

The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, November 22, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.