



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes for Workshop Session II

November 22, 2024

Location		Members Present	Guest Presenters	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		11	0	9:05 a.m.	10:56 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)• Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (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: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm• Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm• Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee• Director of Sustainability: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)• Director, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts (AgBC)					
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)• Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado• Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm• Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition					

I. Call to Order

Dr. Petersen called the meeting to order at 9:05 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.
- Dr. Petersen asked Ms. Meadows if she officially represented the Department of Education on the Council, to which Ms. Meadows responded in the affirmative.

III. Meeting Minutes: November 8, 2024

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Ms. Meadows moved to approve the meeting minutes as presented, with Dr. Olive seconding the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no objections or abstentions.

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

1. Recap of Workshop II Discussion

- Dr. Petersen began by revisiting the robust discussion from the last meeting regarding fiscal year 2025 planning. The prior session covered mandates, action items, required resources, and potential challenges. He stated that the last meeting ended at mandate number 3, and the intent for the current session was to continue the discussion, starting with mandate number 4.
- Ms. Meadows inquired whether the discussion on mandate number 3 had been completed, referencing prior unresolved aspects. She noted that the previous session concluded with an acknowledgment of the importance of the Coordinator's role, but the discussion was limited due to time constraints.

2. **Mandate #3: Coordinator's Role:**

- Dr. Petersen thanked Ms. Meadows for highlighting concerns about the coordinator's position, emphasizing the importance of the Council's objectives. He shared that Dr. Rick Nader from the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) had reported misallocating funds identified in Bill No. 35-0378 for the Department of Agriculture to support the Coordinator role. Dr. Petersen reaffirmed his commitment to securing the Coordinator role as a key step in advancing the strategic initiatives.
- **Next Steps:** Dr. Petersen plans to write to Senator Fred Gregory, Chair of the Finance Committee, to request an amendment to the legislation and redirect the funds to the Department of Agriculture. He will provide an update on this matter at the next meeting.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Additional Staffing Consideration:** The members discussed the supportive Administrative Assistant position initially planned alongside the Coordinator role:
 - Dr. Olive inquired about the potential to hire another individual to fill the remaining 50%, thereby creating a full-time position.
 - Dr. Petersen reminded the Council of the original decision, to begin with one part-time position to establish the role and refine its scope before expanding. He also shared that the position exists but was deprioritized due to Ms. Maynard's performance.
- **Next Steps:** The Council agreed to possibly recruit an Administrative Assistant for the coordinator once the funding issues have been resolved.
- **Office Space and Location Challenges:** The conversation transitioned to discussing physical office space for the Coordinator and administrative support roles:
 - Dr. Petersen stated that the initial plan was for the Department of Agriculture to be the primary location for both roles; however, space constraints remain challenging. He also noted that much of the work could be done remotely and is open to exploring that option.
 - Dr. Usman pointed out that if a remote work option is considered, it may face limitations depending on the organization and highlighted the university's constraints.
 - Mr. Wickrema proposed that with input and approval from Dr. George, perhaps utilizing office space in UVI's Medical School Facilities would be possible.
 - Dr. Angeli offered office space at the Fish and Wildlife Offices in St. Thomas and St. Croix.
 - Mr. Creque suggested the Innovation Center as a possible viable option.
 - Dr. Petersen thanked everyone for their input and acknowledged the multiple viable options for office space. He stated there will be further discussion to finalize once funding is resolved and staffing progresses.

3. **Mandate #4: Local Food and Farm Fund:**

The Council extensively discussed Mandate 4, which focuses on supporting agricultural growth through grants and related programs. Within this mandate, the **501(c)(3)** and the **Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF)** were identified as critical components, providing additional resources to achieve program objectives.

3.1 Establishing the 501(c)(3)

- Dr. Petersen provided an update on efforts to establish the Council's 501(c)(3) status. He explained that this designation would allow the Council to independently secure private funding and grants, expanding its capacity to support farmers and fishermen.
 - Dr. Olive highlighted the importance of this status for building trust and credibility with private sector donors.
- Next Step:** The Council agreed to prioritize this initiative. Dr. Petersen committed to overseeing legal and administrative steps with Attorney Marie Thomas Griffith. Updates on progress will be provided in a future meeting.

3.2 Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF)

- Dr. Petersen clarified the current allocation of the PPPIF, noting the \$500,000 appropriation would be matched by an additional \$500,000 from his department (VIDA), creating a total of \$1 million.

- Dr. Petersen inquired whether subcommittee members tasked with reviewing applications should be compensated for their efforts, emphasizing the significant workload of evaluating applications.
 - Dr. Adamu did not support this idea and cited it as part of the role of being on the Council.
- Dr. Adamu recommended hiring external reviewers to pre-evaluate applications, ensuring a streamlined process and reducing the burden on subcommittee members.
- Dr. Angeli provided additional insights into improving the application platform. She advocated for automation features to flag incomplete submissions and send real-time updates to applicants. She also stressed the importance of providing detailed feedback to unsuccessful applicants to enhance their chances in future cycles.
 - These suggestions were met with support from Dr. Petersen and Dr. Adamu, who agreed that transparency and ease of access are critical.
- Mr. Creque shared that some farmers found the application process intimidating and recommended educational efforts to build applicants' confidence and familiarity with grant applications.
 - Ms. Roberts agreed with this assessment and provided feedback and concerns regarding the application evaluation process, as she highlighted a particular application as an example.

3.3 New Business: Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF)

- Dr. George informed the Council of concerning news that \$500,000 was reallocated from the School of Agriculture's academic budget to support the PPPIF. She expressed concern over the potential negative impact on the university's agricultural education programs and underscored the need for the council to advocate for alternative funding strategies. Dr. George said she would send the communication to Dr. Petersen and Dr. Adamu for review and further discussion.
- Dr. Petersen and Dr. Olive echoed these concerns, with Dr. Olive suggesting increased private-sector engagement to offset the financial strain.

3.4 FFA Banquet, Educational Outreach and Scheduling

- Ms. Meadows proposed hosting an FFA banquet at the Agrifest on St. Croix to enhance the visibility and support for FFA activities. She emphasized the importance of community impact by showcasing students in action during the banquet and convention, ensuring their efforts are seen and celebrated.
- Ms. Meadows recommended engaging the private sector and community contributions to fundraise and reduce reliance on national FFA funding. She also suggested organizing a Young Farmers Panel during the event to align with banquet activities, providing a platform to highlight future agricultural leaders.
 - Mr. Wickrema supported the idea and emphasized using edible centerpieces made from local produce, particularly "misfit" food, to reduce waste and highlight food security initiatives.
 - Ms. Meadows and Mr. Wickrema also discussed incorporating signage and digital tools, such as QR codes, to facilitate donations.
- Mr. Creque raised questions regarding the timing of the banquet, which is scheduled to coincide with the Agricultural Fair in February.
- Ms. Meadows proposed hosting the event on February 14th or 18th to avoid conflicts with fair activities.
- Ms. Roberts highlighted the importance of minimizing logistical challenges for staff and attendees.
- Dr. Petersen and Dr. Adamu acknowledged possible scheduling constraints and agreed to finalize the timing during subcommittee discussions.
- Dr. Petersen suggested convening a full board meeting to ensure alignment and coordination across all events.
- The Council agreed that educational workshops are essential for preparing students for leadership roles and ensuring a meaningful experience for attendees.

3.5 Branding and Community Outreach

- Mr. Wickrema emphasized the need for consistent branding across all materials and events, recommending using the Council's existing logo.
- Ms. Meadows suggested integrating the branding into various platforms, including signage at the Young Farmers Panel, to increase visibility and demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting local agriculture.

4. Mandate #5: Advisory Committee:

- Dr. Petersen reviewed Mandate 5 and clarified the Council's current function.
- Ms. Meadows explained the focus on including educational initiatives for children within the committee's ongoing activities.

- Dr. Petersen identified lingering issues:
 - Some honorary members are awaiting vetting and approval by the Governor's office. Dr. Petersen emphasized that full approval and onboarding of all members are goals for the year.
 - Dr. Petersen proposed a second key action item: amending legislation to officially include fishermen as part of the Council, citing Mr. Ledee's involvement with the Council as an example.
- Resources Needed and Challenges:
 - Dr. Petersen highlighted the need for consistent communication between the Council, the Governor's office, and the Legislature to resolve administrative delays.
 - No significant challenges were identified besides waiting for government office responses.

5. Mandate #6: Local Food Symbol:

- Dr. Petersen emphasized the need for a Brand Awareness Campaign.
- Mr. Wickrema advocated for creating a catchy slogan to accompany the branding, like campaigns in other regions (e.g., "Texas Grown"), which Dr. Petersen supported as a priority for the Council's brand awareness efforts.
- Dr. Usman Adamu raised concerns about public awareness of the Council and its role.
- Dr. Petersen acknowledged this issue and suggested incorporating awareness efforts for the Council and the food symbol under separate mandates.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop a slogan to accompany the Council's logo.
- Promote the Council's role and the food symbol through marketing initiatives, including T-shirts, bags, and radio appearances.
- Upcoming Activities and Resource Planning:
- Two events are upcoming:
 - Agriculture Fair in Bordeaux (January).
 - Agrifest 25 (February).
- Volunteers must staff these events and prepare promotional materials in advance.
- Dr. Adamu recommended hiring additional staff rather than relying solely on volunteers.
 - Dr. Petersen noted funding constraints and the need for legislative approval to reallocate existing funds.

6. Open Discussion:

3.6 Thorn Run Partners Workshop:

- Dr. Petersen shared his observations on the recent workshops on St. Thomas and St. Croix. He noted a significant discrepancy in attendance and engagement between the two locations. On St. Thomas, participation was lower than anticipated, with logistical issues such as poor management of the online waiting room contributing to participant drop-offs. He expressed disappointment that the St. Thomas workshop lacked the hands-on, actionable interactions seen in St. Croix. He emphasized the importance of learning from these differences to improve future workshops.
- Mr. Creque also contributed to the discussion, agreeing with the need for more consistent and impactful delivery across all locations. He stressed the importance of identifying and addressing the logistical and content-related gaps that may have hindered the success of the St. Thomas workshop.

3.7 PPPIF Grant Process:

- Dr. Adamu suggested follow-up workshops to support farmers applying for the PPPIF grant opportunities directly.
 - Dr. Petersen agreed and committed to facilitating these workshops with external partners.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was officially adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

VI. Next Meeting

The following virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, December 6, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.