



Local Food and Farm Council

Check-in Meeting Minutes

January 23, 2026

| Location | | Present | Absent | Start Time | End Time | Recorder |
|--|---|----------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| via Zoom Video Conferencing/*- | | 12 | 12 | 9:06 a.m. | 10:28 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 (VIDA) • Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI) • Co-chair Designee: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI) • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • VIDE Designee: Ms. Cydney Meadows – Territorial Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm • Dr. Rick Nader – Vice President for Research and Economic Development (UVI) • Shanta Roberts – Director, Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program | | | | | |
| Absent: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner, VI Department of Education • VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado • | | | | | |

I. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

- Dr. Petersen, Co-Chair of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. He welcomed members and confirmed that a quorum was present.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Dr. Petersen presented the meeting minutes of **December 12, 2025**, and **January 9, 2026**, for approval.

Actions:

- **Motion:** A motion to approve December 12, 2025, meeting minutes was moved by Dr. Olive and seconded by Director Roberts.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.
- **Motion:** A motion to approve January 9, 2026, meeting minutes was moved by Dr. Adamu and seconded by Director Roberts.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.

III. TAP Grant Academy Update

The Council received an update on the TAP Grant Academy and reflections were invited from members who attended the first session. Members described the session as informative and well-delivered, noting that the presenters demonstrated strong subject knowledge and that the training flowed in a logical and accessible manner. It was observed that the curriculum builds sequentially, and members expressed concern that participants who miss earlier sessions may find it difficult to fully engage in later ones.

Discussion followed regarding participation levels. It was noted that attendance was lower than anticipated and that most participants represented presenters or individuals already engaged in the agricultural community. The need for stronger outreach to farmers and community members was emphasized. Members discussed the importance of not only teaching grant writing but also ensuring farmers have support for implementation, monitoring, and reporting requirements after awards are received.

Ms. Sibilly-Brown reported on attendance figures and confirmed that future sessions would be offered in a hybrid format to increase accessibility on both St. Croix and St. Thomas. She advised that locations were being secured and that promotional efforts would be expanded. She further confirmed that the session was recorded and would be uploaded to the website following editing.

Dr. Nader welcomed feedback and reiterated that the interactive nature of the workshop was intentional and valuable for farmer engagement.

IV. Inter-Island Produce Shipping and Port Fees

Dr. Olive led a substantive discussion on the impact of recent port and barge fee increases on the transportation of local agricultural products. He explained that refrigerated shipping costs have risen significantly and now represent a major operational burden for farmers attempting to move produce between islands. He described the limited availability of refrigerated vessels, the impracticality of air freight due to cost, and the challenges associated with ferry transport that lack proper refrigeration.

Dr. Olive stressed that these conditions pose a direct barrier to strengthening local food systems and undermine the goals of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. He encouraged the Council to consider policy advocacy for fee exemptions or special considerations for locally produced agricultural goods, noting that agriculture has historically received special treatment in other policy areas.

Members engaged in discussion and generally agreed that inter-island transport is a critical infrastructure issue. Several members supported the concept of distinguishing locally produced food from imported goods in fee structures. Co-Chair Petersen acknowledged that precedent exists for agricultural exemptions and indicated his willingness to raise the matter at the policy level. He stated his intention to contact Senator Frederick to explore possible policy solutions that would not require new funding but rather regulatory adjustment.

Ms. Sibilly-Brown suggested inviting Sejah Farm to present its territorial food resilience logistics plans so that the Council could better understand existing initiatives and avoid duplication. Members responded positively.

V. Agricultural Fair Debrief

The Council conducted a debrief on recent agricultural fairs. Members shared observations that while vendor participation remained strong and interest in agriculture continued to grow, overall attendance appeared lower than in prior years. Some members noted that crowds were heavier earlier in the day and declined later, affecting vendor sales patterns.

Discussion moved toward the economic realities faced by farmers. Members acknowledged that fairs carry cultural and community value but may not always yield financial benefit for producers. Ms. Sibilly-Brown raised the importance of evaluating the true economic impact of fairs on farmers and suggested the development of an agricultural fair economic impact report. She noted that some farmers reduce participation when profitability is uncertain and that structured data collection would allow the Council to advocate for farmers and inform planning.

Members agreed that future efforts should be more data-driven and that tracking vendor outcomes and sourcing practices would provide valuable insight for legislative and programmatic support.

VI. Organic Subcommittee Scheduling

Dr. Olive noted the need to convene the Organic Subcommittee. A tentative date of January 29 was discussed, and members indicated availability. Final scheduling was to be confirmed outside the meeting.

VII. Agreements and Follow-Up

The Council acknowledged the need for enhanced promotion of TAP Academy sessions, policy exploration regarding inter-island transport costs, and improved data collection related to agricultural fairs and farmer participation. Follow-up actions include outreach to policymakers regarding transport issues and sharing of catch report forms by Dr. Angeli.

VIII. Adjournment

- There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Royce Creque and seconded. Hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.
- Dr. Petersen thanked the members for their continued engagement and contributions.