



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

February 6, 2026

| Location | | Present | Absent | Start Time | End Time | Recorder |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| via Zoom Video Conferencing/*- | | 8 | 13 | 9:06 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"> • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDA) • 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 • Shanta Roberts – Director, Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) • Dara Cooper – SBDC Agribusiness Consultant | | | | | |
| Absent: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI) • 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 • Dr. Rick Nader – Vice President for Research and Economic Development (UVI) • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program | | | | | |

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 **January 23, 2026**, for approval.

Actions:

- **Motion:** A motion to approve the meeting minutes was moved by Mr. Creque and seconded by Dr. Angeli.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.

III. TAP Grant Academy Update

In the absence of Dr. Nader, Ms. Maynard provided an update on the TAP Grant Academy. She reported that recent promotional efforts, including radio interviews and outreach, resulted in increased visibility and participation. A total of 59 individuals registered, including virtual and in-person attendees on both islands. The final session is scheduled for March 6, 2026, and will follow a hybrid format. She also noted that a bootcamp is being coordinated, with additional details to follow. The St. Thomas location for the March session will move to the 13D Innovation Center.

IV. Organic Agriculture Subcommittee

In the absence of Subcommittee Chair Dr. Olive, Dr. Adamu provided the update on behalf of the Organic Agriculture Subcommittee. He reported that the recent subcommittee meeting was well attended, with approximately six to seven participants, and that several substantive issues were discussed.

- Rising shipping and freight costs affecting agricultural inputs and products in the Territory
- Farmer interest in organic certification
- The need for clearer guidance on certification requirements and processes
- Identifying ways to make certification more accessible to small and mid-sized producers
- Program and funding structure considerations related to organic agriculture initiatives

Discussion

- Dr. Adamu emphasized that increasing shipping costs are a growing burden for farmers and may impact the viability of organic and specialty crop production. He noted that the issue generated significant conversation at the subcommittee level and may warrant broader strategic attention.
- Dr. Petersen highlighted structural and funding challenges, particularly where programs are administered through the University of the Virgin Islands while certain operational or retail expectations involve the Department of Agriculture. He stated that clearer alignment between program responsibilities and funding mechanisms is needed. He also suggested exploring whether more activities could be streamlined within UVI's systems.
- Dr. Adamu shared that he plans to consult with UVI's accounting and administrative offices, including discussions with Mr. Joseph, to explore the feasibility of establishing a revolving or more flexible funding mechanism to support the program.
- Mr. Creque noted that the organic certification process can appear intimidating to farmers. He recommended simplifying communication and improving how certification steps are explained so that farmers better understand the pathway to certification. He stated that reducing perceived barriers could encourage participation while maintaining standards.

V. Local Food Symbol and Integrity Subcommittee

Dr. Angeli reported that the subcommittee's recent meeting focused on strengthening the Local Food Symbol program and ensuring the integrity of its use. Key focus areas included:

- Reviewing language associated with the Local Food Symbol to ensure it accurately represents qualifying products
- Distinguishing between locally grown products and locally assembled value-added products
- Ensuring the symbol remains inclusive of the Territory's diverse agricultural and food production sectors
- Evaluating how the symbol aligns with existing local and regional branding models
- Protecting the credibility and trust associated with the Local Food Symbol

Discussion

- Dr. Angeli explained that the proposed adjustments are intended to clarify eligibility without changing the overall brand identity. She noted that the subcommittee reviewed examples from other successful programs and emphasized the importance of not reinventing existing frameworks.
- Mr. Creque recommended establishing clearer controls over sticker distribution to prevent misuse. He suggested that access be limited to registered or licensed farmers and fishers to ensure that only legitimately qualified producers use the symbol. He noted that unrestricted access could allow imported products to be mislabeled as local.

VI. Events and Activities Update

Director Roberts provided an update on upcoming outreach and promotional activities connected to AgriFest and broader Council visibility efforts. The Events and Activities work currently focuses on:

- Promoting the Local Food and Farm Council brand at AgriFest through shared table displays
- Highlighting the TAP Grant Academy as a key capacity-building initiative
- Using brochures and informational cards in acrylic stands to reach attendees

Director Roberts noted that educational materials in development include a farmer-focused coloring book and updated informational cards. These materials will be circulated to members for feedback once finalized.

Discussion

- Director Roberts asked whether Water Island should be explicitly referenced in promotional language. Council members discussed the matter and generally agreed that when referring to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Water Island is inherently included and does not require separate mention.

- Director Roberts also informed the Council that previously discussed promotional clothing items, such as t-shirts and polos, are currently on hold. This decision reflects a cautious approach to spending while the Council monitors its financial position and prioritizes essential activities.
- Members acknowledged the importance of maintaining outreach efforts while exercising fiscal responsibility. The Council will continue to balance visibility, education, and budget considerations in future planning.

VII. Open Discussion

1. **Conference Participation and External Engagement:** Dr. Adamu encouraged the Council to consider participating in regional and national agricultural conferences to expand visibility, strengthen partnerships, and stay informed about emerging agricultural practices. He noted that these engagements can benefit farmers and agricultural stakeholders in the Territory through knowledge exchange and networking opportunities.

Dr. Petersen added that funding support for conference participation may be available through Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). He suggested that the Council explore building stronger connections with funding organizations that support agricultural development and education.

2. **Agricultural Education and Emerging Opportunities:** Dr. Petersen informed members of a mycelial health workshop taking place in the Territory focused on mushroom production and related agricultural opportunities. He shared that a staff member attended the workshop to gather information and insights that may be relevant to the Council's work.

Dr. Adamu also referenced a recent USDA study projecting strong agricultural career opportunities for graduates in the coming years. He noted that the study highlights agriculture as a growing career field and emphasized the importance of encouraging youth and young professionals to consider agricultural pathways. He indicated he would share the report with Council members.

3. **July Agricultural Conference Planning:** Updates were provided on preparations for the upcoming July agricultural conference. Planning discussions include technical sessions, field visits, and the inclusion of a youth component to promote agricultural awareness among younger audiences. Members acknowledged that planning is ongoing and that further details will be shared as they are finalized.
4. **Watershed Project Update:** Dr. Petersen reminded members of the USDA NRCS watershed project update meeting scheduled for February 26, 2026, at UVI. The meeting will focus on watershed improvements, drainage, and water resource management efforts that support local farmers.
5. **Ag Business Center Funding and Sustainability:** Director Roberts expressed concern regarding the Ag Business Center's financial sustainability beyond September. She noted the need for clarity on future funding and operational support.

Dr. Petersen acknowledged these concerns and stated that funding and sustainability considerations are actively being monitored. He indicated that further strategic discussions will take place outside the meeting to determine next steps.

VIII. Adjournment

- There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Dr. Adamu and seconded by Dr. Olive. Hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.
- Dr. Petersen thanked the members for their continued engagement and contributions.

IX. Next Meeting

- The next meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2026. Members were also reminded of the Agricultural Fair taking place February 14–16.