



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2025

Location	Members	Ex. Absence	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing/*-	9	1	9:04 a.m.	10:35 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) • Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI) • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • 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 • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program • Ms. Diane Hazlewood – Executive Assistant (VIDA) 				
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner, VI Department of Education • VIDE Designee: Ms. Cydney Meadows – Territorial Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado • Dr. Rick Nader – Vice President for Research and Economic Development (UVI) • Ms. Shanta Roberts – Director, Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) • Ms. Sumayah Milan Bryan – Program Assistant to State Sustainability Director (VIDE) 				

I. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

- Dr. Petersen called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and welcomed all members and guests.
- For the record, Dr. Petersen noted that Director Meadows had provided advanced notice of her absence.
- Dr. Petersen announced that Diane Hazlewood, his Executive Assistant at DOA, will be attending the meeting and possibly subsequent meetings.

II. PRESENTATION – 2024 Awardee Site Visit [Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown]

Ms. Sibilly-Brown explained that the Council currently has eleven active grantees, following the withdrawal of one awardee. Six site visits had been firmly scheduled across the islands as of the presentation date. In St. Croix, visits were arranged with Strictly Roots, Mycelium Mann, VI Honeyman, and Mr. Chichester, with outreach underway to confirm appointments with Fishwater Charters and the Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance. Discussions were also ongoing with Mr. Trevor Warner of Pleasant Valley Farms, who was expected to confirm his visit for September 8. In St. Thomas, visits were scheduled with the Staff of Life and Ms. Jacqueline Frett on September 13, while confirmation was pending for Dean Leonard of Ideal Farms due to contact challenges. In St. John, a visit was scheduled with Mr. Perez on September 15, following his return to the island.

Ms. Sibilly-Brown emphasized that all visits would be completed by September 15, 2025, according to the original proposal timeline. Reports would be submitted within one week of completion. She also highlighted her efforts to encourage grantees to attend the respective Tri-Island Town Halls in October, suggesting that farmer testimonies, quotes, and photographs be incorporated into the events to showcase the Council's impact.

Discussion:

- Dr. Olive offered to coordinate directly with Ms. Sibilly-Brown regarding Farmers Alliance reporting.
- Dr. Adamu commended the strategy of inviting awardees to the town halls.
- Mr. Wickrema recommended that future funding agreements require recipients to attend town halls and suggested broader social media promotion for full community participation.
- Dr. Petersen expressed appreciation for the thorough planning and engagement with farmers

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Dr. Petersen presented the meeting minutes of **August 8, 2025**, and **August 22, 2025**, for approval.

Correction Noted:

- No corrections were identified for either meeting minutes.

Actions:

- **Motion (August 8):** A motion to approve the August 8, 2025, meeting minutes was moved by Dr. Adamu and seconded by Mr. Wickrema.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.
- **Motion (August 22):** A motion to approve the August 22, 2025, meeting minutes was moved by Dr. Olive and seconded by Dr. George.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried with a majority in favor. One abstention was recorded from Director Biggs, as he had not been present at that meeting.

IV. REPORTS AND DEBRIEFINGS

A. Senate Hearings – August 15, 2025

• **Department of Agriculture Testimony**

Dr. Petersen reported on the Department of Agriculture's testimony before the Legislature. He clarified that most of the referenced funds were designated for forestry and land management, including acquiring 91 acres on Inner Brass, not for direct agricultural use. He also noted that a \$500,000 Farmer/Rancher Stress Program had lapsed due to loss of institutional capacity and lack of reporting from the partnering institution, which prevented disbursement. Dr. Petersen informed members that a formal written response was being prepared for release pending approval by the Governor's Office.

Discussion

Members discussed the importance of strengthening public communications to accurately understand the Department of Agriculture's programs and funding allocations. Suggestions included using visuals and community-focused briefs to accompany testimony. Members also noted the value of proactive engagement with legislators and the community to build trust and strengthen future presentations.

• **Local Food and Farm Council Testimony**

Dr. George presented the Testimony on behalf of the Council. Her remarks highlighted the importance of organic agriculture and the Council's funding priorities. The Council expressed appreciation for the preparation of the testimony and noted that the presentation was well-received. Questions regarding funding levels were addressed, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support to implement the Agricultural Plan effectively.

B. Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) Data Collection Presentation

Dr. Petersen reflected on the Eastern Caribbean Center's recent data collection presentation. Members discussed the methodology and noted that integrating existing agricultural data sources would reduce farmers' reporting burdens. The Council agreed that accurate data is critical to advancing agricultural planning and that the approach should be designed to respect farmers' time and capacity.

C. EcoVida Presentation

The members reviewed EcoVida's presentation. They raised questions regarding the feasibility of the proposal, particularly its reliance on waste-to-energy as a foundation for agricultural programming. Concerns included the absence of demonstrated results and uncertainty about direct benefits to local farmers.

Discussion:

The members determined that additional evidence and a more explicit demonstration of outcomes would be required before considering endorsing the proposal. Members emphasized the need for transparency, proven technology, and tangible benefits for the agricultural community as prerequisites for future support.

V. Other Business

Ms. Maynard discussed the upcoming Tri-Island Town Halls scheduled for October 6–10, 2025. She underscored the importance of maximizing community participation and visibility through farmer testimonies, social media campaigns, and the wide distribution of flyers.

IX. Adjournment

- With no further business, the meeting was officially adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

X. Next Meeting

- The next LFFC General Meeting is scheduled for **Friday, October 3, 2025**, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.