



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

September 19, 2025

Location		Members	Guests	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing/*-		10	8	9:06 a.m.	10:01 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. Safiya George – President (UVI) • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • VIDE Designee: Ms. Cydney Meadows – Territorial Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Ms. Shanta Roberts – Director, Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) • Dr. Rick Nader – Vice President for Research and Economic Development (UVI) 					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDA) • Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI) • 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 • 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 Ms. Mavel Maldonado • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program • Ms. Sumayah Milan Bryan – Program Assistant to State Sustainability Director (VIDE) 					
Guests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Jessica Venable, Partner – Thorn Run Partners • Dr. Ali Mohamed – Consultant / Retired Director Environmental Systems / National Institute of Agriculture (NIFA) USDA • Dr. Carolyn Boykins-Winrow – UVI Associate Professor • Ms. Diana Collingwood - Founder, VI Women in Agriculture Association • University of South Carolina – Dr. Patrick J. Holladay, Executive Lead and Social and Behavioral Working Group • VIDA – Riise Richards, Deputy Commissioner • VIDA – James Henderson, Agriculture Property Inspector • VIDA – Diana Hazlewood, Executive Assistant 					

I. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

- The meeting of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council was called to order at 7:06 a.m. by Co-Chair Dr. Safiya George.
- Dr. George welcomed members and guests, confirmed that a quorum was present, and expressed appreciation for continued dedication to advancing the mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.

II. PRESENTATION I – Agritourism Development in Estate Bordeaux [Dr. Patrick Holladay]

Mr. Henderson opened the first presentation by sharing the background of the collaboration between the Department of Agriculture and Dr. Holliday of the University of South Carolina. He shared that their partnership emerged from discussions on disaster preparedness for farmers, which evolved into exploring agritourism as a viable tool for expanding economic opportunities and strengthening agricultural engagement across the territory.

Dr. Holladay seeking endorsement from the Council, delivered a comprehensive presentation titled *Building Agritourism for Rural Development in Estate Bordeaux*. He outlined an integrated initiative that aims to transform the Estate Bordeaux farming community into a model for sustainable agritourism. The proposal connects farming, hospitality, and outdoor recreation through the development of cooperative business structures and value-added products. He emphasized that the project directly supports four mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan: business development, coordination, workforce training, and data-driven decision-making.

The project team, led by Dr. Holliday and Mr. Henderson, intends to pursue funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) under the Rural Economic Development program. The proposal, which seeks up to \$650,000 over five years, will focus on developing agritourism infrastructure, fostering small business resilience, and creating scalable models that can be replicated on St. Croix and St. John. The team invited the Council to participate as a formal collaborator in the grant submission, with a target completion date of October 15, 2025, ahead of the USDA's October 30 deadline.

Discussion:

- **Dr. Nader** expressed interest in partnering on the proposed initiative. He requested clarification on the grant solicitation, including the specific program area within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (USDA-AFRI), to allow UVI to review requirements and explore potential alignment.
 - **Dr. Holladay** confirmed that the proposal would be submitted under *Section 6 – Rural Economic Development*, which supports placemaking and rural enterprise initiatives. He explained that the maximum award amount is \$650,000 over five years, though the team may consider a shorter three-year proposal depending on budget modeling. He offered to share the full Request for Proposals (RFP) document for review.
- **Dr. Venable** inquired about the project timeline and whether the team would be able to meet USDA's submission requirements within the limited window.
 - **Dr. Holladay** acknowledged that the timeline was condensed but noted that preliminary work was already underway. The team plans to complete the draft proposal by October 15, 2025, allowing time for institutional approvals and submission ahead of the October 30 deadline.
- **Dr. Olive** asked whether this project was related to a previous Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant submitted by Dr. Holliday and his collaborators.
 - **Dr. Holladay** clarified that the AFRI proposal is distinct from the SARE project, though the two are complementary. The SARE initiative focuses on regional agritourism research and farmer networking, whereas the AFRI proposal is site-specific to Estate Bordeaux and intended as a replicable model for other islands.
- **Dr. Olive** observed that it would be helpful for the Council to understand Dr. Holliday's prior experience in Puerto Rico, where he successfully supported post-Hurricane Maria agritourism development.
 - **Dr. Holladay** described his work in Puerto Rico beginning in 2018, which has expanded into a network of fifteen farms offering value-added products, on-farm lodging, and educational experiences. He stated that this success demonstrates the model's scalability and that similar outcomes could be achieved in the Virgin Islands through collaboration and farmer engagement.
- **Mr. Creque** voiced strong support for the initiative, calling it a timely and practical opportunity to strengthen both farming and tourism on St. Thomas. He affirmed his willingness to support implementation efforts.
 - **Dr. Holladay** thanked Mr. Creque for his endorsement and acknowledged that local participation from Bordeaux farmers would be essential to the project's success.
- **Dr. Olive** added that the Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance would be pleased to collaborate and provide a letter of support for the grant application, emphasizing shared goals of expanding agritourism and enhancing the territory's food-system resilience.
 - **Dr. Holladay** expressed appreciation for the offer and welcomed the Alliance's participation, noting that its cooperative approach aligns closely with the project's objectives.

Follow-Up Direction:

Dr. George requested the coordination of a separate meeting with interested stakeholders, including Dr. Petersen, Dr. Nader, Dr. Adamu, Dr. Nate Olive, and Mr. Creque, to further discuss collaboration and the Council's prospective role in the proposal.

III. PRESENTATION II – Territorial Agricultural Plan (TAP) Fellowship Program [Dr. Rick Nader, Dr. Jessica Venable, and Dr. Ali Mohamed]

Dr. Nader presented an update on the Territorial Agricultural Plan (TAP) Fellowship Program alongside Dr. Venable and Dr. Muhammad from Thorn Run Partners. Dr. Nader described the fellowship as a leadership and capacity-building initiative that supports the implementation of the Agricultural Plan by training emerging leaders to manage projects, secure funding, and enhance food security across the territory.

Dr. Venable explained that the application and selection process was highly competitive and involved both qualitative and quantitative scoring criteria. Candidates submitted written statements, resumes, and project proposals demonstrating alignment with TAP priorities. After careful review and interviews, two fellows were selected for the inaugural 2025–2026 cohort: Dr. Carollyn Boykins-Winrow, Associate Professor at the UVI School of Agriculture, and Ms. Collingwood, Founder of the Virgin Islands Women in Agriculture Association and former Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture.

Each fellow will commit approximately twenty hours per month to TAP-related initiatives focusing on project leadership, collaborative development, grant acquisition, and train-the-trainer programming. They will also participate in leadership development workshops and the upcoming Grants Academy Boot Camp hosted by Thorn Run Partners in Spring 2026.

Introduction of Fellows Awardees:

Dr. Boykins-Winrow expressed gratitude for her selection and shared details of her proposed project, which integrates service learning into the UVI agricultural curriculum. Her initiative aims to provide students with experiential opportunities through community projects, fostering stronger connections between academic learning and local agricultural development. She plans to design toolkits enabling faculty to easily embed service learning into their courses.

Ms. Collingwood described her extensive background in agricultural education and her commitment to youth mentorship. She outlined her ongoing work to strengthen the Virgin Islands Women in Agriculture Association and develop a technical and educational pipeline for young people through programs such as the *Regeneration Corps*. Her goal is to expose students to careers in agricultural science, facilitate college preparation, and cultivate the next generation of professionals who will support the territorial agriculture industry.

Discussion:

- **Dr. Olive** congratulated the Fellows and asked how their individual projects would connect with ongoing agricultural initiatives, particularly those addressing training and workforce development across the islands.
 - **Dr. Nader** explained that each Fellow's project is designed to align with specific components of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, ensuring measurable community benefit. He noted that the TAP Fellowship encourages cross-collaboration between Fellows, UVI, and government agencies so that outcomes, such as workforce readiness programs, community engagement, and educational materials which can be integrated into broader agricultural initiatives.
- **Mr. Creque** commended the emphasis on leadership development and asked whether the Fellowship would provide opportunities for participants to work directly with farmers in the field.
 - **Dr. Venable** confirmed that field engagement is a central part of the program. Fellows will participate in hands-on activities, including workshops, producer meetings, and extension-based collaborations that connect their academic expertise with real-world agricultural challenges.
- **Director Meadows** inquired whether the program would expand to include additional Fellows in future years and how the Council might assist with sustainability.
 - **Dr. Muhammad** stated that the TAP Fellowship was conceived as a multi-year initiative and that expansion is anticipated as funding allows. He added that continued collaboration with the Council, through policy guidance, mentorship, and alignment with Agricultural Plan priorities which will be essential for program growth.
- **Dr. George** asked how progress will be monitored and shared with the Council to ensure transparency and visibility of outcomes.
 - **Dr. Nader** indicated that Fellows are required to submit quarterly progress reports and a final summary report at the end of their term. These reports will highlight milestones, partnerships, and measurable impacts, and will be shared with the Council to support ongoing coordination.

- Dr. Olive expressed enthusiasm about the program’s focus on capacity-building and suggested that the Council might host future sessions where Fellows could present their progress or findings to the broader agricultural community.
 - Dr. Venable welcomed the suggestion and noted that such presentations would enhance collaboration and visibility for the TAP program’s contributions to the territory’s agricultural sector.

Follow-Up Direction:

Dr. George thanked the presenters for their work and reaffirmed the Council’s support of the Fellowship. She recommended coordination with the TAP team to receive quarterly updates for circulation to members and to explore opportunities for public presentations at upcoming Council meetings.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Dr. George presented the meeting minutes of **September 5, 2025**, for approval.

Correction Noted:

- No corrections were identified for the September 5, 2025, meeting minutes.

Actions:

- **Motion:** A motion to approve the September 5, 2025, meeting minutes was moved by Mr. Creque and seconded by Director Biggs.
 - **Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.

V. Discussion: Council Presentation and Endorsement Procedures

Dr. George initiated a discussion regarding the Council’s process for evaluating external presentations and endorsement requests submitted through the official online contact form. She emphasized that presenters should demonstrate clear alignment with the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan to ensure that meeting time is used efficiently.

Discussion:

- Dr. Olive recommended requesting applicants to specify how their initiative supports the eight mandates of the Agricultural Plan and to include a link to the Plan for reference.
- Members agreed that only proposals offering tangible contributions to the Virgin Islands agriculture sector should be scheduled for presentation.
- The Council reached consensus that a structured submission and review process will maintain transparency and uphold the Council’s mission to implement the Agricultural Plan effectively.

IX. Adjournment

- With no further business, Dr. George thanked all members for their contributions for the productive exchange of ideas.
- The meeting was officially adjourned at 10:01 a.m.

X. Next Meeting

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