



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

October 17, 2025

Location		Present	Absent	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing/*-		9	10	9:02 a.m.	10:06 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) Co-chair Designee: 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 VIDE Designee: Ms. Cydney Meadows – Territorial Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee Director 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: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner, VI Department of 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: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm 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) 					

I. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

- The meeting of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council was called to order at 9:02 a.m. by Co-Chair Designee, Dr. Usman Adamu, acting on behalf of Dr. Safiya George.
- Dr. Adamu informed that Co-Chair Dr. Louis Petersen had notified the Council of his absence.
- Dr. Adamu welcomed members and guests, confirmed that a quorum was present.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Dr. Adamu presented the September 19, 2025, meeting minutes for approval. There were no corrections, additions, or deletions identified.

Actions:

- Motion:** To approve the September 19, 2025, meeting minutes as presented.
 - Moved by:** Mr. Harith Wickrema
 - Seconded by: Director Wayne Biggs
- Vote:** The motion carried unanimously. There were no objections or abstentions.

III. EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES DEBRIEFING

A. VIDA Bordeaux Sustainable Construction Project

Dr. Adamu introduced the first debriefing item, noting that Commissioner Louis E. Petersen, Jr., was unable to attend the meeting and that he may be able to provide a detailed update at the next meeting. In his absence, Director Biggs provided a summary of the Bordeaux Sustainable Construction Project groundbreaking ceremony.

Director Biggs reported that the event was well attended and well received by the community. The ceremony featured remarks by Dr. Petersen, the Governor, and representatives from We Grow Food, Inc. It also showcased two new pieces of heavy equipment, a water truck and backhoe, and acquired to support ongoing construction and agricultural operations. Director Biggs further noted that while the project's financial specifics would be discussed in greater detail at the next session, it was a significant milestone for the Bordeaux agricultural district.

Discussion:

- Following the report, Dr. Adamu inquired about the funding source for the project and whether it originated from local or federal allocations. Director Biggs responded that the initiative was funded through resources made available by the Governor's Office using American Rescue Act (ARA) allocations, adding that Dr. would provide a comprehensive update at the next meeting.
- Dr. Adamu expressed appreciation for the clarification, emphasizing that the Bordeaux community has long faced challenges related to water access and that this project directly supports one of the Council's key agricultural priorities—water infrastructure and sustainability. He commended the progress being made and noted that such efforts align with the broader objectives of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, particularly those focused on improving the resilience and productivity of local farming communities.

B. Tri-Island Town Hall Series – October 2025

Dr. Adamu then invited Director Roberts to provide an update on the ongoing Town Hall Series hosted by the Council across the three islands.

Director Roberts reported that the first session was held on October 6 in St. Thomas, followed by the second session on October 8 in St. Croix. She stated that the St. Thomas Town Hall was well organized and included participation from government officials, agricultural professionals, and community members. Presenters offered progress updates on the eight mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, which were well received by attendees and prompted thoughtful discussion.

The St. Croix Town Hall, though successful in content and coordination, experienced lower-than-expected attendance due to limited promotion and public awareness. Nevertheless, speakers delivered valuable updates, and attendees offered constructive feedback. Director Roberts added that both sessions provided learning opportunities that will inform the planning and execution of the final Town Hall, scheduled for October 27 in St. John.

Discussion:

- Mr. Wickrema commended the success of the initial sessions and proposed enhanced promotional efforts for the upcoming St. John Town Hall, recommending increased use of radio interviews, social media outreach, and word-of-mouth campaigns through the Island Green Living Association. He also referenced collaboration with the "Seeds of Security" program spearheaded by Director Meadows and emphasized the importance of including both farmers and the general public to build interest in food security initiatives.
- Dr. George confirmed her availability to attend the St. John event and supported expanding community engagement to ensure that the Council's presence and outreach reflect its territorial scope. She noted that visible participation by both Co-Chairs helps reinforce public trust and underscores the Council's active leadership.
- Director Roberts thanked members for their feedback and confirmed that new strategies were being implemented to strengthen publicity and attendance for the St. John event. She also acknowledged feedback from attendees of the first two Town Halls, who expressed interest in clearer information about available agricultural funding and grant opportunities, suggesting that this component be incorporated into future sessions.

Dr. Adamu concluded that the Town Hall Series continues to serve as a vital platform for community engagement and transparency in advancing the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.

IV. Council Operational Matters and Upcoming Meeting Schedule

Dr. Adamu noted that the next scheduled Council meeting, originally planned for October 31, 2025, coincides with Liberty Day, an official University of the Virgin Islands holiday.

Director Roberts reviewed the meeting calendar and observed that the following meeting dates, November 14 and November 28, also present challenges, with the latter overlapping the Thanksgiving holiday. She therefore proposed rescheduling the Council's November meetings to November 7 and November 21, maintaining the bi-weekly cadence while avoiding conflicts.

Members expressed support for the recommendation, noting that both proposed dates fall on Fridays, consistent with the Council's established schedule.

The members approved that formal communication will be sent to formally obtain consensus for the cancellation of the October 31 meeting and revise the meeting schedule to Friday, November 7 and Friday, November 21, 2025.

V. Technology and AI Integration in Council Operations

Dr. Adamu introduced the final discussion item concerning the integration of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) into the Council's administrative operations to ensure alignment with the new policy of the university, under which the Council's operating systems are hosted. He highlighted the growing use of AI tools in education, government, and agriculture to improve efficiency in document preparation, communication, and data management.

- Dr. Adamu emphasized that while technology should be embraced, its use must align with ethical standards, confidentiality requirements, and human oversight.
- Director Roberts shared that AI tools have been used successfully for meeting summaries, agenda creation, and process automation in other organizations but recommended that the Council establish clear parameters and guidance before adopting such tools.
- Dr. George agreed, stressing that AI should be viewed as a supplemental tool rather than a replacement for human review and accountability. She underscored the importance of maintaining accuracy and transparency in all Council documents and communications.
- Director Biggs added that any implementation should adhere to existing Government of the Virgin Islands and University of the Virgin Islands information technology policies to safeguard data integrity.
- Dr. Nader informed members that the university currently has an AI Policy Committee developing a comprehensive policy addressing the teaching, research, and administrative use of artificial intelligence. He noted that the policy was nearing completion and that this would be an appropriate time for the Council to provide input or seek alignment, as the university's framework could serve as a helpful reference in shaping the Council's own approach.
 - Dr. Adamu thanked Dr. Nader for the update and agreed that coordination with the university's committee would provide valuable guidance as the Council explores the development of an internal AI usage policy.

VI. Adjournment

- There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:06 a.m.

VII. Next Meeting

- The next LFFC General Meeting will be confirmed by the members and circulated.