



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

November 7, 2025

Location		Present	Absent	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing/*-		9	11	9:06 a.m.	10:16 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) DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife 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 Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm 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 Designee: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (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: 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 Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz 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

- The meeting of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council was called to order at 9:06 a.m. by Co-Chair Dr. Louis Petersen.
- Dr. Petersen shared that Co-Chair Designee Dr. Usman Adamu notified the Council of his absence in advance.
- Dr. Petersen welcomed the members and confirmed that a quorum was present.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Dr. Petersen presented the October 17, 2025, meeting minutes for approval.

Actions:

- Motion:** To approve the October 17, 2025, meeting minutes as presented.
 - Moved by: Mr. Harith Wickrema
 - Seconded by: Dr. Nicole Angeli
- Vote:** There were no objections or abstentions, and the motion carried unanimously, and the minutes were adopted as presented.

III. EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES DEBRIEFING

3.1 Bordeaux Cistern Construction Project Update

Dr. Petersen delivered an in-depth overview of the long-awaited cistern construction project at Estate Bordeaux on St. Thomas. He noted that the project underwent extensive interagency review, and the building permit that was delayed for several weeks was finally secured. This approval enabled the contractor to schedule the official start date for December 1, 2025. He emphasized that the project represents the only ARPA-funded major infrastructure initiative approved for the Department, despite proposals submitted for all three islands. Still, he affirmed the Department's intent to complete similar initiatives on St. Croix and St. John through local funding or other grant sources. The new cisterns will significantly expand water storage capacity for the farming community, especially given the high volume of rainwater currently lost due to limited storage at the existing farmers' market roof system.

Discussion:

- **St. John rainwater access challenges:** Members discussed the substantial hurricane damage to the St. John office, including missing roof sections that once housed guttering. Because of this destruction, the office cannot harvest rainwater until reconstruction is completed. Commissioner Petersen confirmed ongoing efforts to restore the facility and reiterated that improving water access on St. John remains a priority.
- **Multi-layered water solutions remain necessary:** Members sought clarity on whether desalination remained part of the long-term strategy for Bordeaux. Dr. Petersen confirmed that desalination has not been eliminated from consideration. Instead, it remains one option among a broader portfolio of strategies, such as improved storage, NRCS-supported drainage systems, and agricultural best practices, that collectively strengthen water resilience in the area.
- **St. Croix Community Garden expansion and well integration:** Members emphasized the urgent need for more acreage and better water access for high-producing St. Croix farmers who are currently restricted by plot size and disease buildup. Dr. Petersen explained that the Department plans to subdivide the southern area of the Community Gardens into two-acre plots and to connect two additional wells previously transferred from WAPA. A surveying estimate of approximately \$20,000 is being processed for payment. He acknowledged the tension between expanding land for high-performing producers and addressing the long waitlist of applicants but ensured that both fairness and demonstrated productivity would guide decisions.
- **Hazardous road conditions for St. Thomas farmers: Mr. Creque** described serious safety concerns on the road leading to his farm, noting a near-accident and multiple days of being unable to drive up the hill. Dr. Petersen responded that the district currently lacks heavy equipment operators, requiring temporary support from St. Croix. He also confirmed ongoing discussions with the Department of Public Works and committed to providing a coordinated plan by the end of the following week.

3.2 Tri-Island Town Hall Series – October 2025

Director Roberts presented a thorough recap of the October Tri-Island Town Hall Series held in St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. She highlighted that St. John achieved the highest turnout, nearly 60 participants. The session featured robust discussion, active community engagement, and strong representation from local food producers. Council members reported that the tone was overwhelmingly positive, with residents seeking clarity rather than expressing frustration. Director Roberts emphasized that featuring local food at each town hall was enthusiastically received and should be continued to celebrate the territory's agricultural identity.

Dr. Roberts mentioned the recent media engagement efforts, including radio interviews on *Analyze This* featuring Dr. Olive and Mr. Wickrema, which helped elevate awareness of agricultural initiatives across the territory. Director Roberts reiterated the importance of consistently updating the Council's Facebook page and website with event photos, summaries, and program updates.

Dr. Petersen recognized the members, vendors, and the volunteer support provided by Ms. Lisa Herbst and Ms. Isabel, of Island Green Living, for their contributions in photography, coordination, and outreach for the Town Hall Meetings engagement efforts.

Discussion:

- **Community response and emerging agricultural leadership:** Members reflected on the positive community energy observed in St. John. Residents expressed strong interest in learning more about agriculture, public-private partnerships, and local grant opportunities. Several young rising farmers participated, including an Ag Discovery alumnus and Public-Private Partnership Fund awardees, demonstrating the growing talent pipeline across the territory.

- **Importance of showcasing local food producers:** The inclusion of a local vegan food provider during the St. John town hall was particularly impactful. Members noted that attendees enjoyed tasting dishes sourced from local gardens and that showcasing producers fosters deeper community interest in sustainable agriculture. The Council agreed that this practice should continue at future events to highlight the creativity and skill of local farmers and food artisans.
- **Youth engagement opportunities:** Members discussed the possibility of establishing a dedicated Youth Agriculture Council. This group would serve as a leadership incubator for young people already active in agriculture, allowing them to observe Council meetings, provide input, and build long-term expertise. Several members emphasized that preparing the next generation of agricultural leaders is essential for the territory's future food security.
- **Seed distribution and inter-island logistics:** Ms. Meadows described significant logistical barriers in transporting seed boxes, chicks, and prawns from St. Croix to St. John. Members noted that these delays create challenges for farmers relying on timely access to materials. Dr. Olive and Mr. Wickrema offered the use of weekly refrigerated shipments and on-island pickup assistance, ensuring that future deliveries could reach St. John safely and quickly.
- **Proposed restructuring of future town halls:** Director Roberts suggested transitioning from three separate town halls to a single annual territorial meeting, rotating across the islands each year. The other two islands would join remotely. Members agreed that this approach would consolidate resources, increase participation, and reduce scheduling conflicts while still ensuring equitable representation across the territory.

IV. Council Operational Matters

4.1 December Meeting Confirmation

- Members confirmed that the Council's final meeting for 2025 will be held on December 12, which is also UVI's last open business day before the holiday closure.
- Director Roberts recommended an outreach to other agency to identify if there are any major activities or events that may conflict or align with the Council scheduled meeting dates for 2026.

4.2 Participation in the 2026 Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agricultural & Cultural Vegan Food Fair

- The Council reaffirmed its commitment to participating in the annual Bordeaux Vegan Food Fair on January 17–18, 2026, and the Annual Agrifest 2026 – February 14 – February 16, 2026. As customary, the Council will share space under the Department of Agriculture's tent and coordinate an updated staffing schedule.

Discussion:

- Members recommended recruiting agriculture students to assist at the table, providing both community service hours and real-world exposure to agricultural careers.
- Mr. Wickrema stated that Gift Hill School students may be an additional resource, and volunteering can be applied to their senior service hours.
- Members agreed that it will be important to maintain a consistently staffed table was emphasized as essential to achieving strong outreach and visibility for the Council.
- Dr. Petersen recommended providing t-shirts for the volunteers at these events. Dr. Olive added that the Council explore button down shirts for the members that can be used in formal settings.

VI. Adjournment

- Commissioner Petersen thanked members for their dedication and specifically commended the entire team for successfully executing the territory's first Tri-Island Town Hall Series.
- With no additional agenda items, the meeting adjourned at 10:06 a.m.

VII. Next Meeting

- The next LFFC General Meeting is scheduled for **Friday, November 21, 2025**, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.