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Local news

Food and Farm Council Holds St. Croix Town Hall Meeting

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Fruits and vegetables that are grown in the Virgin Islands. (Photo courtesy VI Local Food and Farm Council)

Leaders of the Food and Farm Council explained the territory's Agriculture Plan to a small audience Wednesday night at the Great Hall of the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Croix.

Louis Petersen, Agriculture commissioner and Sommer Sibilly-Brown, newly appointed coordinator for **local Food and Farm programs**, took turns with other presenters to talk about the plan's components and status for the first hour of the town hall. The second hour was open for comments and questions from the audience.

The council includes members of the community as well as government officials: Petersen, Safiya George, UVI president, Wayne Biggs, Jr., chief executive officer of the V.I. Economic Development Authority, Jean-Pierre Oriol, commissioner of V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Usman Adamu, UVI dean and director and Dionne Wells-Hendrington, V.I. Education commissioner. The council also includes honorary members Nate Olive, Royce Creque, Abeba Sellassie and Edmon

Titre representing the farmers. Honorary members Winston Ledee and Marvel Maldonado represent fishers.

The council, which meets biweekly, also includes Renee Charleswell, Cydney Meadow, and Harith Wickrema from VIDE, Nicole Angeli, and Sennai Habates from DPNR.



The council provides grants, technical assistance, training and resources. They also participate in community events and public education. They engage with the Legislature and advocate for funding in support of farmers and fishers.

Petersen and Sibilly-Brown also talked about the status of several of the plan's mandates, including education and training for students and farmers. The Sustainability and Agriculture Education Program has been established with Cydney Meadows as the territorial director, and the number of agriculture educators around the territory has increased from four to 38. And, student participation has increased by 500%. Additionally, students at Eulalie Rivera K-8 School have been given a hydroponic freight farm trailer as a mobile green classroom.

Another mandate that has seen action by the council is collecting data. Record keeping helps farmers decide policy and fundraising needs. Also, progress reports produce accountability and ensure small farmers and home gardeners are counted and supported. Last year, environmental impacts, including precipitation levels, were tracked.

The council has also established business models to help expand food sovereignty and strengthen the local market with Agriculture Business Centers on all three islands. Under the direction of Shanta Roberts, they plan to expand the centers with training, services and hopefully funding.



A similar town hall was held on St. Thomas Monday. St. John will host the event Oct. 27 from 6-8 p.m., with registration beginning at 5:30 p.m., at the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, St. John Annex Conference Room. Those who wish to participate virtually, [click here](#).