

# **We Grow Food, Inc.**

**Bordeaux Farmers Market  
6513 Estate Fortuna  
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802**

Good Morning All Senators – Committee on Agriculture

Senators, We Grow Food, Inc. endorse the building of two (2) agricultural processing facilities; one in each district. The STT/STJ district facility should be built in the Bordeaux on the designated farmland under the authority of the Dept of Agriculture.

Processing facilities are long overdue. A processing facility is an important component in Agricultural development. This facility will eliminate spoilage as we can process fruits before they go bad. Processing give us “value-added products” such as juices, jams, jellies, stews, sauces, and many more. A processing facility would stabilize and augment our agricultural industry. It would enable farmers to make more revenue to reinvest in themselves.

Many farmers already make juices. Juices in particular, like these I have on display, is a big item for processing. Traditionally, we make juice. It’s nothing new. Juice is a big cultural item. As a community, however, we purchase imported juices on a daily basis. Processing our own fruits help us nutritiously and economically. Farmers will be processing fresh, mature, tropical fruits, and sharing in the juice market. Producing great juices would require great fruit. Growing great fruit require a great agricultural program. A great agricultural program require a great agricultural infrastructure. A great agricultural infrastructure requires funding (money).

Senators, as you know we must invest in the development of our agricultural industry. That is why I am again introducing to you my 1% plan: 1% of the Virgin Islands budget for ten (10) years to develop our agricultural industry. I’m not saying to develop a agricultural project. I am suggesting developing the industry that would become self-sufficient after ten (10) years. This 1% proposal will address our agricultural needs.

This 1% proposal would collaborate with the 200 acres of fruit orchard proposal and a much needed agricultural training program (Growing the Next Generation of Farmers), the 'Julie in Every Yard' initiative, Mango being the 'Virgin Islands Fruit of Choice' and of course, it includes these Agricultural Processing Facilities proposal. The 1% proposal will be shared between districts (Stx 55% and Stt/Stj 45%).

This 1% also address heavy equipment needs and repairs, an increase with the administration of the department to acquire adequate staffing and a disaster fund. A disaster fund is needed right now because of drought conditions we are experiencing, right right now as I speak.

We are in need of water now before our crops are lost. We need water from the dams in Bordeaux bottom to move to needed farm areas. We are in need of a pump and piping that can service these farm areas. Water is there but movement is not. This is an ongoing situation for the past ten (10) years. This water issue is a problem so basic to the fundamentals of agricultural development and need to be immediately addressed, even before I leave this Senate building because our crops are dying! We need the water to develop the fruits to even satisfy the plants in making this processing plant a success story for the entire community.

Allow me to introduce you to the juices that I brought today: Passionfruit, Papaya, Tamon, Hibiscus, Sorrel and Cashew. I thank everyone for their time. Thank you Audience. Thank you Senators for allowing me to express a few words on behalf of Agricultural development.

*Elridge Thomas*  
*President WE GROW FOODING*