

**Testimony in support of Bill No. 31-0091  
an "Act requiring the Department of Agriculture to conduct a Feasibility Study of the  
Production, Marketability and Medicinal Value of Moringa trees in the Territory  
and the potential commercial value of Hemp and Bamboo production."**

**By**

***Dr. S. B. Jones-Hendrickson***  
**Chief Economic and Fiscal Policy Advisor**  
**Office of the Governor**  
**US Virgin Islands**  
**June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**The Honorable Janette Millin Young, Chairperson, Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning, 31<sup>st</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and other members of the 31<sup>st</sup> Legislature, good afternoon. My name is Dr. Simon B. Jones-Hendrickson, Chief Economic and Fiscal Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor of the US Virgin Islands. My specialization is Macroeconomics, Microeconomics and other Economic issues as they pertain to Econometrics, Economic Forecasting, Labor Economics, Monetary and Fiscal Policies. *I want to make it absolutely clear that I am not an expert on Moringa trees, Hemp, and Bamboo, and I am not an Agriculturist.***

**My statement here today is to support the idea that the Department of Agriculture may wish to explore the possibility of the economic value of the three plants noted in the Bill No. 31-0091, namely Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo. In the current economic climate of the USVI, any feature that has an economic potential is worthwhile exploring and in that regard, the essence of Bill No. 31-0091 may be considered as another possibility of a revenue stream for the Virgin Islands. This, of course, would be contingent upon the research that the Department of Agriculture undertakes and the results of the findings about the marketability of the three plants in question.**

**In today's economic space, there is an up-welling of developments in a variety of features in the plant space, the technological space, music, publishing, the arts, culture, and intellectual property rights, to name some features. Inherent in all of these new developments is a business model that is best codified as a "business disruption model." In other words, in today's business environment there is a focus on doing things in the non-traditional way. Thinking outside of the box, or as I like to say, thinking as if there is no box to box us in and thus constrain our thought process. Note we are saying business disruption, not business destruction.**

**Today's businesses and government agencies are seeking to deliver service and sell products that were once considered a waste of time, but which products are now properly mapped in a space where there is an App for everything. Apps or applications are all over the economic landscape. Likewise, trees and bushes that we take for granted, but which our fore parents understood in very clear terms, are now given prominence in the market space. It is from that perspective why I would support the Agriculture Department undertaking a study to determine the economic value of Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo. I know Hemp under another name has gotten a substantial series of discussions in the VI. Perhaps it is best for us to now take the bull by the horns and explore the scientific, medicinal and economic value**

of the three plants and establish, all things being equal, another revenue stream for the economy. If we are not barking up the wrong tree, pardon the pun, the benefits of the study may outweigh the costs.

Implicit in all of this plan to have a feasibility study undertaken by the Department of Agriculture on Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo is the internal question of innovation. Innovation which was once called Research and Development is now the new buzz word linked to exploratory features in the economic space. Innovation is the present catalyst for tidal waves of new ideas in a variety of areas. Everything now has some innovative feature. Here, therefore, is the kernel of what may be possible in a feasibility study of the three plants, and other plants for that matter. We too often take our flora and fauna for granted. We take our marine life for granted. Our fish, our corals are taken for granted, for the most part. In other words, we take our plant life and animal life for granted and only move when someone outside of our environment tells us that we have something called the Noni Tree, or that we can can coconut water; or that we can make delicious jams and jellies from tamarind and mango, and sell them on eBay and Amazon; or that there is a fish now called the Lion fish in our waters and that we need to do something about it, before it decimates our fish stock. Then we jump to be first in the parade, but sometimes that jumping is too late. This is the time for us to explore the profundity of our plants and animals on the land and in the seas to determine the economic values that surround us.

In this sense we can then locate our studies and research in a business model to capture the change that is moving us from a static state to a dynamic state. We have to craft new market ventures and encourage new business ventures to incorporate innovation that will revolutionize the business environment. Such changes could lead us to be on the cutting edge of change and transformation and literally move our society, reposition us on a trajectory leading to new revenue streams where we satisfy customers, satisfy us who make the VI our home by birth and choice, and enable all of us to share in any largesse that will emanate from the studies of our flora and fauna and the attendant application of benefits to be derived.

Plants have always been of central moment in the economic lives of people. The basic needs of foods, shelter, clothing, and health care, are all linked to plants. Today companies do synthetic derivatives from plants, but plants are the root of many medicines. As our society expands and incomes contract or expand, the importance of our plants assume a new dimension and perspective. A study like the one that is implicit in what the Department of Agriculture may wish to undertake, may mean that one will be going against the current or going against the grain. Sometimes we have to go against the current, go against the prevailing view and do and dream what may seem like outlandish ideas. But Apple and Facebook were outlandish ideas. Tesla cars and driverless cars were outlandish. Sometimes we have to be outlandish to determine the scope and scale of our abilities and capabilities.

Three years ago when I was in Morocco, I first experienced the essence of Amber Perfume Oil. Amber, by definition, "is fossilized tree resin...appreciated for its color and natural beauty." In non-traditional medical shops all kinds of products from plants were on sale in Morocco and were distributed by individuals who were best considered the pharmacists of the products from plants. Amber is a very expensive oil. In the VI there are several entrepreneurs who are blending oils for health, beauty, and

skin care. This is an area where, in addition to the three plants mentioned in the bill, we may wish to explore how we can expand the industry for the entrepreneurs involved.

It is to be borne in mind that the innovation that I am suggesting, is not a smooth walk along the beach. The exploration of the marketability and economic viability of Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo may make some people uncomfortable, confused and disgruntled. But innovation must entail some levels of confusion, especially if we are not sure what the future holds. That is why the idea of Bill No. 31-0091 for the Department to conduct the feasibility study of Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo, is of such significance that we should not give the idea short shrift. We need to explore all options: short term, medium term and long term benefits. We need to go blue skies and open skies and explore what if scenarios. Once the study is completed and found feasible, then we must be ready to exploit the economic benefits. Even if the study is found not feasible, there may be benefits to be derived from the process. Sometimes we have to dig a little deeper to find the water in the well.

Our task in today's Virgin Islands economy is to continuously scan the environment for economic opportunities. We have to be riveted to the economic plan to find where we can transition ourselves and the economy. We have to keep our eyes glued to the distance that there will be a change in the body economics, even if in the short-run the relevance of what we are seeing and doing does not make sense. As a fisherman once said, it is the boat that you cannot sink that can lead you to dry land and mammoth developments.

What is vital about Bill No 31-0091 and its proposal is the fact that its implementation would enable us to have base-line data on Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo here in the Virgin Islands and farther afield. Today we live in a data-dependent and data-driven society. We cannot continue to make decisions based on whims and fancies. Big data and the analysis of such data permits us to segue into the granular state of ideas and thus permits us to find the secret sauce of doing things the right way, or producing products from a different frame of reference.

In the final analysis, while I am not a specialist in the three plants to be studied for their marketability and economic potential for us here in the Virgin Islands, from an economic perspective, I welcome such a study because it will move us to see the plants in a different light. This is where innovation comes into play. I would hope that from the study we could see the plants not from the way we have always seen them, but rather see Moringa, Hemp and Bamboo from a vision that others have not seen or considered. Many of us have vision, but we cannot see. It is my hope that this proposed study of the three plants will enable us to see that the new businesses will create profit centers for new economic development matrices, and which businesses will put us in a new space where we give more intrinsic value to our flora and fauna.

Thank you, and good afternoon.

S. B. Jones-Hendrickson, Ph.D.