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Agricultural Experiment Station

TO: Members of the 31st Legislature's Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning

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FROM: Dr. Robert W. Godfrey, Ph.D. Robert W Godfrey
Director – Agricultural Experiment Station &Professor – Animal Science

DATE: May 25, 2015

SUBJECT: Testimony for Bill No. 31-0100 – An Act amending title 7, Virgins Island Code, Chapter 1, to allow for the cultivation of Hemp and other related purposes

The mission of the Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of the Virgin Islands is to conduct basic and applied research to meet the needs of the local agricultural community to increase production, improve efficiency and develop new enterprises. This is accomplished by generating science-based information that leads to improved agricultural practices in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean Region. Our research programs are influenced by the needs of the public, the farming community and research conducted at other agricultural research institutions.

Language in the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the Farm Bill, provides authority to universities and state departments of agriculture to cultivate industrial hemp for research purposes if the growing and cultivating of industrial hemp is allowed under the laws of the state. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures there are currently thirteen states that have statutes establishing commercial industrial hemp programs. In addition, seven states have passed laws establishing industrial hemp programs that are limited to agricultural or academic research purposes.

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This bill (No. 31-0100) will provide for a new agricultural commodity to be produced in the U.S. Virgin Islands and can have a positive financial and social impact on the community. It is the responsibility of the Agricultural Experiment Station, one of the Land Grant programs at the University of the Virgin Islands, to conduct research that will assist local producers and respond to their needs. In cooperation with local and federal agencies research could be supported through grants that will evaluate industrial hemp production practices that are best suited to the local environment. The research projects conducted by AES scientists would deal with addressing topics such as variety trials, water and nutrient requirements, weed and pest management, harvesting methods and frequency, production rates, use as a cover crop in integrated systems and post-harvest management.

Scientists in the Agricultural Experiment Station would need to obtain additional grant funds from sources such as federal agencies, most likely the USDA, and/or industry to support these new research activities. Results of the research would be distributed to the scientific community through presentations at regional, national and international conferences and publication in peer-reviewed, scientific journals. Science based information would be disseminated locally with the cooperation of the UVI Cooperative Extension Service and the VI Department of Agriculture.

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