



Island Green Living Statement for LFFC Testimony on August 15, 2025

On behalf of all of us at Island Green Living, I want to underscore the importance of investment and support for VIDE's "Seeds of Security" Sustainability & Agricultural Education (SAE). Thank you to the Senate and the Governor's Agricultural Plan, which was implemented a few years ago.

As we all know, one of the most critical issues in our territory is the fact that currently 97% of our food supply is imported. It is imperative that our young people are given the tools, education, and engagement to be the future agents of change while supporting their need for fresh, nutritious food today. The SAE, developed by the exceptional VIDE team, which includes "Seeds of Security" programming, encompasses age-appropriate agricultural and sustainability content incorporated into curriculum; hydroponics and other school growing systems so they can learn hands-on food production, composting, etc.; FFA engagement; farm-to-school fresh produce, and so much more.

The provision of grow bags and seeds that students will use to create their own container gardens at home ensures the "seeds of security" are shared with families and the community. More food grown in the territory means better nutrition as well as less food waste, less packaging, and less pollution.

"When students grow it, they eat it." "Seeds of Security" programming not only feeds students' minds and bodies, it also awakens their passion and engagement. It is shown that programs such as "Seeds of Security" lower absenteeism and increase the health of not only students, but the community. It inspires innovations such as reducing food waste by freeze-drying, AI techniques and more. By creating a new generation of involved and environmentally educated torch-bearers who understand our direct connection with food, we ensure the future of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The financial investment in these initiatives now will come back tenfold in the years to come.

Action Items:

- *Every student must experience growing seeds.*
- *Inculcate the value of seed-to-plate with essay competitions, songs, art, STEAM projects, research, class debate, oratory, etc. Now we are not only harvesting fruit but also growing the intellectual capital of our next generation. Details as outlined in UNESCO-collaborated Planet Green Force program.*
- *As Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education Cydney Meadows outlined in her presentation to the LFFC, greening education should be a vital part of day-to-day teaching.*
- *Supporting organic farming initiatives, which will eradicate harmful pesticide usage, potentially contributes to less health issues, reduction of hospital stays, and increased organic composting and mulch, thereby reducing landfill fires. Can we also think like other major cities/states in other countries which have gone completely organic with no harmful pesticides? This will help promote USVI as an eco-tourism destination, adding valuable income to our coffers.*

So honorable senators, we are all intertwined. We need to move away from operating in silos. What does this mean? Our Governor demonstrated his commitment to this tenet when I asked for a meeting with commissioners in preparation for an EPA \$20 million climate grant. Within days, he arranged a meeting with the heads of Education, Agriculture, Waste Management, and DPNR. Let us add EDA, UVI, USDA, and the Conservation Board and collaborate on agriculture and sustainability related projects. By teaming up, we can increase yield and make a significant impact vs smaller individual attempts.

Let us promote teamwork and a ONE territory approach, working together to increase the harvest from our combined efforts.

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