



U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL
Advancing Agricultural Sustainability and Food Security in the USVI

TESTIMONY OF

DR. SAFIYA GEORGE, CO-CHAIR

V.I. LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL

AUGUST 15th, 2025

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS, AND FINANCE
THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

**FRITS LAWAEZ LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE ROOM
ST. CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairman, Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., members of the Committee on Finance, Senators of the 36th Legislature, fellow testifiers, members of the press, and the listening and viewing public. I am Dr. Safiya George, President of the University of the Virgin Islands and Co-Chair of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council. I am joined today by my fellow co-chair, Commissioner of Agriculture, Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., Dr. Usman Adamu, Dean of the School of Agriculture at the University of the Virgin Islands, Mr. Harith Wickrema, President of Island Green Living, Ms. Shanta Roberts, Director of the Agriculture Business Center, and other members of the Council.

Since assuming co-leadership of the Council in August 2024, we have continued to work urgently and purposefully to advance the Eight Mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. Our focus has been strengthening cross-agency coordination, improving transparency in funding allocations, building public-private partnerships, and reinforcing the vital role of data in shaping agricultural policy. We have also ensured that farmers and fishers are well represented on the Council and that their needs and voices remain at the forefront of these efforts.

This commitment to meaningful representation has guided our collaborations with agencies, community partners, and producers, ensuring that every initiative reflects the Agricultural Plan's strategic goals and the on-the-ground realities of those who grow, harvest, and supply our local food systems.

Today, we are here to provide a clear picture of our progress in FY2025, address ongoing funding gaps that have affected implementation, and present our recommendations for FY2026 to ensure continued momentum and accountability.

We thank this Committee and the Legislature for their continued support and partnership in building a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food system for the Virgin Islands.

FUNDING GAPS AND FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

While the Council is grateful for the Legislature's appropriation of \$1,424,500 under Act 8918 to advance the mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, we must address a critical issue that has hindered implementation: unreleased and potentially misappropriated funds.

Two appropriations are of particular concern:

- **Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF) - \$500,000**
Section 5 of Act 8918 appropriated \$500,000 to the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority (VIDEA) to launch and administer the Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF) and a Farmer's Grant Matching Fund, in alignment with Mandate #2 of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. Although the program was successfully implemented for the first time

in FY2024, VIEDA has not received the FY2025 appropriation, and communication regarding the release of these funds is ongoing with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

- **Critical Staff Hiring Funds - \$383,000**

Section 3 of Act 8918 included an initial appropriation of \$383,000 to the University of the Virgin Islands Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP), which was later determined to be a misallocation. Act 8979, Section 12, amended this by redirecting the funds to the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture to support the hiring of essential personnel, including the Local Food and Farm Coordinator, in alignment with Mandate No. 3 and Additional Recommendation No. 3. Establishing this coordinator role is widely recognized as vital to aligning operations, streamlining communication, and ensuring that activities across agencies remain connected to Plan goals. As of this testimony, the funding has not yet been released, and a formal update on its status is still pending.

These funding delays have had a direct and tangible impact, most notably in pausing the second cycle of the grant program for farmers and fishers, and delaying the hiring of the Coordinator, both of which are essential to maintaining momentum, supporting producers, and driving coordinated infrastructure and planning initiatives.

The Council respectfully requests this Committee's continued support in working with the relevant agencies to ensure the appropriated funds are disbursed promptly and transparently. The success of the Agricultural Plan depends on collaborative follow-through that transforms legislative intent into real-world results for our producers and communities.

GOVERNANCE, KEY DEVELOPMENT, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Since convening in July 2023 under Mandate No. 5 of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, the Local Food and Farm Council has met bi-weekly. It continues to refine its structure, partnerships, and implementation strategy to build the systems needed to implement the Plan effectively.

Key Developments from Late 2023 to 2025

1. **Strengthening Farmer and Fisher Representation:**

The Council continues to center the perspectives of farmers and fishers by ensuring their active participation in decision-making, planning, and community engagement. Building on last year's inclusion of honorary farmer and fisher representatives, these members now serve as vital contributors, bringing firsthand knowledge of production realities, local food systems, and territory-specific challenges.

To formally recognize their contributions, honoraria continue to be issued in accordance with Act 8716. This honorarium validates their expertise to the Council and supports their ability to engage in Council activities and represent the farming and fishing communities.

2. **Leadership Transition and Strategic Reorientation:**

In August 2024, Dr. Safiya George was appointed as Co-Chair of the Council, joining continuing Co-Chair Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr. Together, we have built upon the Council's foundational work to enhance alignment, strengthen inter-agency collaboration, and advance the timely implementation of the Plan's Mandates.

3. **Refinement of Council Committees:**

The Council voted to formalize subcommittees focused on Finance and Budget, Education, and Operational Policy Alignment to improve mandate tracking, engage external partners more effectively, and support timely implementation updates to the Legislature.

4. **Outreach to Public Officials and Community Stakeholders:**

The Council has actively engaged with key stakeholders, local organizations, farmers, fishers, and elected officials, to raise awareness of the Agricultural Plan's scope and build momentum toward broader community buy-in. In 2025, the Council led and participated in several key outreach efforts, including hosting a hybrid Public Forum in collaboration with Senate President Milton E. Potter, participating in the 26th Annual Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agriculture & Culture Vegan Food Fair in St. Thomas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands Agriculture and Food Fair.

Looking ahead, planning is underway for the Tri-Island Town Hall Series, which will bring meaningful public engagement to each island. These interactive sessions will share clear updates on the Agricultural Plan's progress and invite open, honest conversations with farmers, fishers, and the community. In doing so, the Council will show the Plan at work and ensure that their voices remain a driving force in how it moves forward.

The Council also monitors and supports emerging opportunities for collaboration between public and private partners that can advance the mandates of the Agricultural Plan. One recent example is the University of the Virgin Islands' acquisition of the Island Fresh Aquaponics facility on St. Croix. This development has the potential to expand aquaponics and aquaculture initiatives in ways that benefit farmers, fishers, and the broader agricultural sector through shared expertise, infrastructure, and innovation.

FY 2025 IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The Local Food and Farm Council and its partners made substantial strides in FY 2025 toward advancing the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. With the support of appropriated funds and inter-agency collaboration, key programs were executed across education, data collection, farmer and fisher support, and capacity building. Efforts this year prioritized sustainable practices, increased outreach to the agricultural community, and strategic alignment with the Plan's Eight Mandates.

- **Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) – University of the Virgin Islands**

The AgBC expanded its services across all three islands, supporting 24 active clients and hosting five educational sessions with 85 participants. Workshops covered soil management,

livestock pasture practices, and economic planning for startups. Partnerships with DOE and the University of Puerto Rico enhanced bilingual programming and youth engagement. In June 2025, the AgBC received its FY2025 allotment of \$250,000, ensuring continuity and deeper outreach.

- **Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) – University of the Virgin Islands**
The ECC completed its second year of data collection on agricultural production, land use, and farmer/fisher demographics. Participation increased substantially, providing improved insight into production trends such as gains in breadfruit, avocado, and plantain yields. ECC will integrate agency data (e.g., VIDOA, DPNR) in Q4 to enhance analysis and support evidence-based policy development.
- **Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) – University of the Virgin Islands**
The OSP implemented the TAP Fellows Program and TAP Grantsmanship Academy, helping build local federal grant development capacity. These initiatives aim to reduce consultant dependence, strengthen internal talent pipelines, and align future grant proposals with TAP priorities and mandates.
- **Council Operations and Organic Agriculture Planning**
Operational progress included formalizing subcommittees, streamlining coordination, and improving public communications. Funding appropriated under Act 8918 supports initial steps toward an organic agriculture initiative. In response to community input and Legislative support, the Council will convene interested members to explore pilot programs and inter-agency partnerships promoting soil health, certification assistance, and sustainable practices aligned with Mandates Nos. 1 and 4.
- **Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund – V.I. Economic Development Authority**
The FY2024 grant cycle received 106 applications. Twelve were approved; 11 accepted funding, totaling \$485,567. The Council has engaged a program evaluator to conduct site visits and prepare a report on implementation outcomes to guide future cycles and strengthen accountability.
- **Sustainability and Agricultural Education (SAE) – V.I. Department of Education**
The Sustainability and Agricultural Education Division finalized a full curriculum framework and delivered programming to over 450 students. Activities included STEM-aligned workshops, food orchard installations, and the arrival of the Freight Farm hydroponics lab, providing hands-on exposure to modern agricultural practices. Collaborative efforts with VIDA and community organizations expanded youth engagement and school-based production.

FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 PRIORITIES AND BUDGET REQUEST

As we prepare for Fiscal Year 2026, the Local Food and Farm Council is focused on deepening implementation across the Eight Mandates of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. The foundation laid during FY2025 has clarified operational gaps, affirmed community needs, and demonstrated strong local participation and demand across programs.

To meet those needs and accelerate our impact, we respectfully submit the following funding priorities, which are aligned with corresponding mandates and supported by documented outcomes.

Continuing the Agriculture Business Center (AgBC)

Funds to be Received By: University of the Virgin Islands (SBDC)

Mandate Addressed: No. 2

Requested Allocation: \$250,000

The Agriculture Business Center (AgBC), launched in December 2023, is a vital resource hub for farmers and fishers on all three islands. While the center began operations in FY2023, it did not receive its first formal appropriation until FY2025. Despite the funding challenges, the AgBC delivers essential services such as business planning, technical assistance, grant preparation, and navigation of federal and local programs.

To maintain this critical support infrastructure, the Council requests a continued appropriation of \$250,000 for FY2026. This funding will allow the AgBC to sustain its current operations, retain key staff, and continue providing consistent, territory-wide services in alignment with Mandate No. 2.

As of mid-2025, AgBC supports 24 active clients, and demand continues to grow, particularly for certification guidance, sector-specific training, and bilingual assistance. Continued funding will ensure the AgBC can meet these needs and preserve access for the agricultural and fishing communities.

Council Operations & Implementation Strategy

Funds to be Received By: University of the Virgin Islands

Mandate Addressed: Nos. 4, 5, & 8

Requested Allocation: \$300,000

To maintain its critical operations and strategic oversight functions, the Local Food and Farm Council requests continued funding to support implementation activities across multiple mandates of the Agricultural Plan. In FY2025, funding enabled coordination of bi-weekly meetings, development of the Food Symbol and marketing framework, facilitation of interagency water and infrastructure planning, and advancement of organic agriculture programming in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture.

The requested FY2026 appropriation of \$300,000 will ensure the Council can:

- Sustain administrative operations and staffing to support cross-agency coordination, issue honoria
- Implement next-phase activities for the Food Symbol program, including product marketing and community education
Short-term and long-term planning around water infrastructure and organic agriculture priorities
- Produce timely, data-driven reports and policy recommendations
- Host stakeholder engagement events, including the Tri-Island Town Hall Series and community informative activities.

This investment safeguards the Council's ability to advance the comprehensive and accountable execution of the Agricultural Plan. Strategic alignment across agencies and programs would be significantly diminished without operational support.

Support for Organic Agriculture

Funds to be Received By: University of the Virgin Islands

Mandate Addressed: Nos. 1, 4, & 7

Requested Allocation: \$150,000

To promote sustainable agricultural practices, improve soil health, and expand marketing opportunities for farmers, the Council recommends a dedicated appropriation of \$150,000 to support organic agriculture across the Territory. These funds will provide education, technical assistance, and resources for producers exploring or transitioning to organic methods.

Funding for organic agriculture was first appropriated in FY2025 under Act 8918 as part of the Council's operational budget. Building on that foundation, the Council will work with stakeholders and agency partners to implement priorities identified through the USDA's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), administered locally by the Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance. The TOPP Organic Farming Needs Assessment, based on farmer and industry input, identified several key initiatives:

1. Annual organic certification cost share to cover expenses not reimbursed by USDA.
2. Pilot buffer zones to protect organic and transitioning farms from chemical drift.
3. Stocking of organic farming inputs at the VIDA depot, including fertilizers, compost, pesticides, and seedlings.
4. Integration of organic agriculture into Department of Education programs.
5. Development of organic wholesale marketing channels to connect producers with buyers.

The Council, including its organic farming subcommittee, is committed to advancing these initiatives in alignment with Mandates Nos. 1, 4, and 7 of the Agricultural Plan, ensuring that farmer and fisher voices remain central in shaping a resilient, Territory-wide approach to organic agriculture.

Grant and Funding Strategies – Office of Sponsored Program (OSP)**Funds to be Received By:** University of the Virgin Islands (OSP)**Mandate Addressed:** Nos 4, and 5; Additional Recommendations 1**Requested Allocation:** \$250,000

The Council requests an FY2026 appropriation of \$250,000 to the University of the Virgin Islands' Office of Sponsored Programs to secure major federal grants that address the Territory's water, irrigation, infrastructure, and other critical agricultural needs.

This funding will support the continuation and expansion of the TAP Grantsmanship Academy and the Grants Fellows Program, which have proven effective in developing a local pipeline of grant-writing talent. These programs equip fellows and participating agencies with the tools to track, apply for, and manage complex funding opportunities across agencies and sectors.

The Office of Sponsored Programs has actively pursued climate resilience, agricultural infrastructure, and workforce development grants. With continued funding, the Council can strengthen inter-agency coordination, reduce reliance on external consultants, and improve access to sustained federal and philanthropic resources aligned with the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.

Data and Research Continuity – Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC)**Funds to be Received By:** University of the Virgin Islands (ECC)**Mandate Addressed:** No. 8**Requested Allocation:** \$150,000

Over the past two years, the ECC has completed extensive data collection that has significantly improved the territory's understanding of food production, land use, and the demographics of local farmers and fishers. Continued funding will enable the ECC to sustain this critical work, initiate trend analysis across multi-year datasets, and support data-informed decision-making at all levels.

This appropriation will also allow ECC to expand its methodology by integrating administrative datasets from partner agencies such as DPNR and the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, enhancing the depth and accuracy of future reports. These efforts are directly aligned with Mandate No. 8 and will ensure the Council's actions are grounded in reliable, comprehensive data.

Hiring of Critical Staff at the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture**Funds to be Received By:** Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture**Mandate Addressed:** No. 1, 3, and Additional Recommendation No. 3**Requested Allocation:** \$400,000

The continued absence of essential personnel, including the Local Food and Farm Coordinator, Soil Scientist, Water and Soil Conservationist, Plant Pathologist, and Civil Engineer, has significantly constrained the Department's ability to implement core mandates of the Agricultural Plan. These roles are not duplicative; they represent specialized expertise necessary for water infrastructure planning, land

and soil assessments, conservation practices, regulatory alignment, and inter-agency and federal deliverables coordination.

Among these, the Local Food and Farm Coordinator is the cornerstone of the Agricultural Plan. This position is responsible for day-to-day oversight of mandate implementation, tracking agency deliverables, coordinating Council directives, and liaising between farmers, government agencies, and external partners. Without this role filled, operational continuity, follow-through on priorities, and stakeholder engagement remain fragmented and reactive. The Coordinator is also tasked with tracking grant implementation, helping scale federal partnerships, and serving as a territory-wide resource for agricultural systems development.

To address these long-standing gaps, the Council respectfully requests a dedicated FY2026 appropriation of \$400,000 to support the hiring and onboarding of these critical positions. These hires will:

- Restore functional capacity at the Department of Agriculture
- Accelerate the execution of Mandates Nos. 1 and 3 related to land use and water planning
- Enable timely response to farmer requests, permitting, and technical support
- Strengthen federal alignment and eligibility for USDA and EPA technical grants
- Provide continuity and accountability across Council-led initiatives

Timely investment in personnel is essential for operational readiness and unlocking broader system change and long-term resilience.

Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF)

Funds to be Received By: Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority

Mandate Addressed: No. 2

Requested Allocation: \$1,000,000

The inaugural PPPIF grant cycle demonstrated extraordinary interest and profound need, with over \$4.6 million in funding requests from 106 applicants, nearly nine times the FY2024 appropriation. Applicants represented a broad spectrum of producers and small businesses across all islands, seeking capital for equipment upgrades, land use improvements, and operational expansion. Ultimately, 11 awards totaling \$485,567 were made, and site visits are now underway to evaluate implementation progress, document community impact, and inform policy.

Since the close of the 2024 cycle, the Council has received regular inquiries from farmers, fishers, and small-scale producers eager to apply for future funding opportunities. This ongoing demand underscores the program's credibility and perceived value among stakeholders and reinforces the need for consistent investment to build local capacity.

To meet this need and responsibly expand the program's reach and effectiveness, the Council respectfully requests an increased FY2026 appropriation of \$1,000,000. This expanded investment will:

- Increase the number and size of awards to support high-impact, shovel-ready proposals
- Expand outreach to underserved producers and food-insecure communities

- Position the program to attract matching support from USDA and philanthropic partners via a 501(c)(3) fund now under legal development

The PPPIF is one of the most direct tools for strengthening local food systems, stimulating agricultural entrepreneurship, and advancing the Virgin Islands' climate and economic resilience goals under Mandate No. 2.

Sustainability and Agricultural Education (SAE) Expansion

Funds to be Received By: Virgin Islands Department of Education

Mandate Addressed: No. 7

Requested Allocation: \$500,000

Sustainability and Agricultural Education continue to lead transformative curriculum development and hands-on agricultural education across the Territory. FY2026 funding will support the full rollout of the Freight Farm program, sustain school-based food orchards, expand CTSO participation, and implement the approved SAE curriculum across public schools.

This investment is not simply programmatic; it is foundational. The Territory is cultivating a generation prepared to advance local food production, sustainability, and economic self-reliance by embedding agricultural literacy and food systems training in the classroom. The long-term return includes a stronger agricultural workforce pipeline, greater food sovereignty, and a more resilient Virgin Islands.

Summary of Requested FY2026 Appropriations

Agency	Priority Area	Relevant Mandates	Requested Amount
University of the Virgin Islands	Agriculture Business Center	Mandate No. 2	\$250,000
	Organic Agriculture	Mandate Nos. 1, 4, & 7	\$150,000
	Council's Operation	Mandate No. 4, 5 & 8	\$300,000
	Eastern Caribbean Center	Mandate Nos. 8	\$150,000
	Office of Sponsored Programs	Mandate Nos. 4,5 & Add'l Rec. 1	\$250,000
VI Department of Agriculture	Critical Staff Hiring	Mandate Nos. 1, 3, & Add'l Rec. 3	\$400,000
VI Department of Education	Sustainability and Agricultural Education	Mandate No. 7	\$500,000
VI Economic Development Authority	PPPIF Grant Program	Mandate No. 2	\$1,000,000
Grand Total Request for FY 2026:			\$3,000,000

The Council respectfully submits this request to transform the Virgin Islands into a model of food sovereignty, economic resilience, and sustainable development. Legislative investment in these priority areas will allow us to build on demonstrated success, meet overwhelming community demand, and deliver stronger outcomes across all three islands.

CLOSING REMARKS

The Local Food and Farm Council remains committed to advancing the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan through transparent governance, inter-agency coordination, and inclusive community engagement. Over the past fiscal year, significant strides have been made across education, economic development, infrastructure planning, and public-private partnerships, even amid funding shortfalls and procedural delays.

Looking ahead to FY2026, the Council respectfully seeks this Committee's support for increased investment in high-impact programs already delivering measurable outcomes. Specifically, assistance is requested in:

- Releasing all appropriated funds under Act 8918, with oversight measures to avoid future delays;
- Increasing funding for the Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund to meet high demand among farmers and fishers;
- Ensuring critical vacancies at the Department of Agriculture are filled to meet operational responsibilities outlined in the Plan;
- Supporting strategic initiatives—including organic agriculture, youth engagement, local product labeling, and grant readiness—each aligned with key mandates.

Your continued leadership has been essential in building the foundation for resilient, community-driven agricultural development. On behalf of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to present today's testimony and for your unwavering commitment to food sovereignty in the Virgin Islands.

Furthermore, the Council has been invited by Senator Hubert L. Frederick, Chair of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, on November 10, 2025, to deliver and report on implementing the Territorial Agricultural Plan. Today's testimony focuses on immediate FY2026 budgetary priorities, but we welcome the upcoming opportunity to present our continuing outcomes, evolving challenges, and long-term goals before that body.

The Council remains fully engaged and available for continued dialogue, collaboration, and clarification. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your steadfast commitment to the farmers, fishers, and our Territory. I am honored to appear before you today and will do my best to respond to any questions.

APPENDICES TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following documents are submitted in support of this testimony and reflect the Council's ongoing implementation efforts, collaboration with agency partners, and progress across the Eight Mandates of the Agricultural Plan:

University of the Virgin Islands

- Appendix A – Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report
- Appendix B – Eastern Caribbean Center – 2023–2024 Annual Data Collection Brief
- Appendix C – Office of Sponsored Programs / TAP Fellows – Grantsmanship Program

Virgin Islands Department of Education

- Appendix D – Sustainability and Agricultural Education (SAE) Quarterly Report

Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority

- Appendix E – Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund Program Quarterly Report



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

Agriculture Business Center FY 2025 Second Quarter Summary Report

Client Engagement and Services

In the second quarter of FY 2025, the Agriculture Business Center (Ag BC) successfully enrolled 2 new clients, bringing the total number of clients served to 23. Our efforts continue to focus on providing valuable resources, guidance, and support to entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector.

Promotional Activities

The Agriculture Business Center played an active role in promoting our services and fostering community engagement by participating in key agricultural events:

1. 26th Annual Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agriculture & Vegan Food Fair

The Ag BC participated in this event on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, showcasing our services and supporting local farmers and food producers.

2. 53rd Annual Agriculture & Food Fair of the U.S. Virgin Islands

We also represented the Ag BC at this prestigious event on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, further promoting our initiatives to a wider audience and reinforcing our commitment to the agricultural community.

3. SBDC DAY- Site visit to client farms, partaking in local fauna and produce

Support for Women in Agriculture

The Ag BC provided valuable support to the **Three Queens Venture (TQV) Women's Business Accelerator Program**; a program focused on women in agriculture with significant potential. We assisted in identifying potential candidates who could benefit from intensive training, mentorship, and potential on-site visits to enhance their business growth.

Collaboration and Representation

The Ag BC participated in several critical forums and collaborations to ensure that the needs of farmers and fishers in the Virgin Islands are heard and supported:



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

1. **Agricultural & Fisheries Public Forum**

We represented the Ag BC at this important forum, a collaboration between the Local Food and Farm Council (LFFC) and Senator Milton E. Potter, Senate President. The forum focused on gathering insights and input from farmers, fishers, and the community to shape the development of a proposed farmers' market on the eastern side of St. Thomas.

2. **UVI School of Agriculture CES – NOAA Aquaculture Grant Collaboration**

As co-principal investigators (Co-PIs) on the NOAA Aquaculture Grant, we collaborated with the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) School of Agriculture CES on a \$30,000 proposal. Although we were notified that we did not receive the grant, we remain committed to refining our proposal and plan to reapply.

Workshops and Training

On **March 25th**, the Ag BC co-hosted the workshop “**Virgin Islands Organic Farming & Careers in Organics.**” The workshop aimed to provide local farmers with insights into organic farming practices and potential career opportunities in the organic sector.

Grant Assistance

The Ag BC successfully assisted two clients in completing and submitting their applications for the **Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) Grant**. The notification of the award for this grant is expected in May.

Conclusion

The Agriculture Business Center continues to make meaningful strides in supporting the agricultural community of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through active participation in key events, strategic collaborations, and personalized client assistance, we remain committed to fostering growth and sustainability in the local agricultural sector.

Looking ahead, we will continue refining our proposals, exploring new opportunities, and working closely with our clients to help them achieve their business goals.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shay Roberts, Director



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

Agriculture Business Center

FY 2025 Third Quarter Summary Report

Period Covered: April 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025

Client Engagement and Outreach

During the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2025, the Virgin Islands Agriculture Business Center (Ag BC) made significant strides in expanding and supporting the local agricultural community. The Center welcomed five new clients, increasing its reach and influence within the industry. Currently, the Ag BC serves a total of 24 registered clients, providing continuous advisory and mentorship support under the leadership of Director Roberts.

Client Activity:

- **New Clients Added:** 5
- **Total Active Clients:** 24
- **Client Losses:** 1, due to business closure caused by persistent economic hardships

Throughout the quarter, the Center delivered a total of five educational events, comprising two webinars and three workshops. These programs collectively engaged 85 participants throughout the territory, fostering knowledge transfer and capacity building among agricultural entrepreneurs.

The Center did not receive funding for FY 2024. However, in June 2025, it secured its designated financial allotment of \$250,000 from the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands for FY 2025. This funding will support ongoing operations, program delivery, and client services.

The Ag BC remains fully committed to empowering local agricultural entrepreneurs by providing essential resources, expert guidance, and sustained support. The Center's efforts continue to prioritize sustainability and the enhancement of business resilience across the Virgin Islands agricultural sector.



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

Collaborations and Partnerships

The Ag BC continued to strengthen its community partnerships and collaborative efforts throughout the quarter, including:

- **Department of Education:** Collaborated with Director Cydney Meadows on the development of the Farmer Career Manual, a capstone project designed to enhance agricultural career pathways for students across the territory.
- **Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands:** Worked with Ms. Diana Collingwood on the 2025 Equipment-Only Grant application process, ensuring greater accessibility and support for local agricultural producers.
- **University of Puerto Rico Agriculture Experimental Station & Agriculture Extension Service:** Collaborative efforts are underway to launch bilingual workshops in the territory. UPR offers another resource for technical and business support to our local farmers. Co-hosted two educational webinars for farmers.
- **Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance (VIFA):** Participated in a collaborative webinar with VIFA and the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), further promoting information-sharing and network-building across the sector.
- **Virgin Islands Network of Environmental Educators (VINE):** Participated in a collaborative webinar with organizations involved in environmental and educational initiatives, further promoting information-sharing and network-building across the sector.
- **PR/USVI SBA Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC):** Co-hosted a specialized workshop, "The Economics of Small Business Start-Up," to address the unique needs of veteran agricultural small business owners.

Community Engagement & Promotion

To further promote the Ag BC's services, our team attended and represented the center at several key events:

- **Annual Farmers Meetings** organized by the Department of Agriculture on both St. Croix and St. Thomas.



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

- **Fisherman Meeting** hosted by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) on St. Croix.
- **Local Food and Farm Council:** Director Roberts serves as Acting Chair when necessary to ensure continuity of meetings to propel the business of the council forward.

Training and Capacity Building

This quarter, the Ag BC offered a robust training program, including:

- A **2-part Tree Workshop Series** covering the fundamentals of ***Basic Tree Planting (June 18)*** and ***Basic Tree Pruning (June 25)***, designed to enhance crop management knowledge among local farmers.
- An **in-person, Hands-On Planting and Pruning Demonstration Workshop**, which provided practical, real-world training following the successful classroom sessions was held on June 12 in St. Croix and on June 19 on St. Thomas.
- Strategies for Establishment, Renewing, and Managing Pasture for Small Ruminants, June 24
- Soil Management Practices Under Organic Agriculture Production Systems, June 26

Grant Application Support

The Ag BC continued its active role in grant support services:

- **Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program:** Provided hands-on assistance to farmers applying for the USDA-funded 2025 Equipment-Only Grant, which aims to strengthen the middle of the food supply chain in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- **RAFI's Caribbean Infrastructure Grant:** Assisted our farmer clients in the application process, resulting in one of our clients receiving a grant award this quarter.



VI Agriculture Business Center Quarterly Report

Conclusion

Despite economic challenges impacting some agricultural businesses, the VI Ag Business Center remains steadfast in its mission to serve and empower local farmers and agripreneurs. Through targeted outreach, dynamic partnerships, and practical training initiatives, the Ag BC continues to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of the Virgin Islands' agricultural sector.

Prepared by:

Shay Roberts

Director

Virgin Islands Agriculture Business Center

Date: July 17, 2025

Local Food and Farm Study Update



Eastern Caribbean Center
University of the Virgin Islands
July 2025

Charge to the Eastern Caribbean Center – Year Two

In its second year, the Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) will continue its role in leading the annual survey of agricultural and fishing activities, business trends, and production across the Territory. This ongoing effort supports the evaluation of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan by tracking progress, identifying challenges, and informing policy decisions.

Working in partnership with the Agricultural Task Force and the Department of Agriculture, the ECC will refine and implement its evaluation plan to measure key indicators more precisely. Purposeful sampling will again be used during this non-census year to ensure consistent and systematic data collection.

The ECC will produce the second annual agricultural progress report and continue to build a comprehensive database to support year-over-year and long-term analysis. As the official State Data Center for the U.S. Virgin Islands, the ECC brings continued expertise in statistical methodology and population research, ensuring the reliability and relevance of the findings.

This year's work builds on past accomplishments, including the Agricultural Processing Plant Feasibility Study and the Virgin Islands Community Survey, and reflects the ECC's commitment to supporting evidence-based agricultural development in the Territory.

Methods of Data Collection

The Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) was tasked with collecting high-quality data from home gardeners, community farmers, and local farmers and fishers across both districts of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

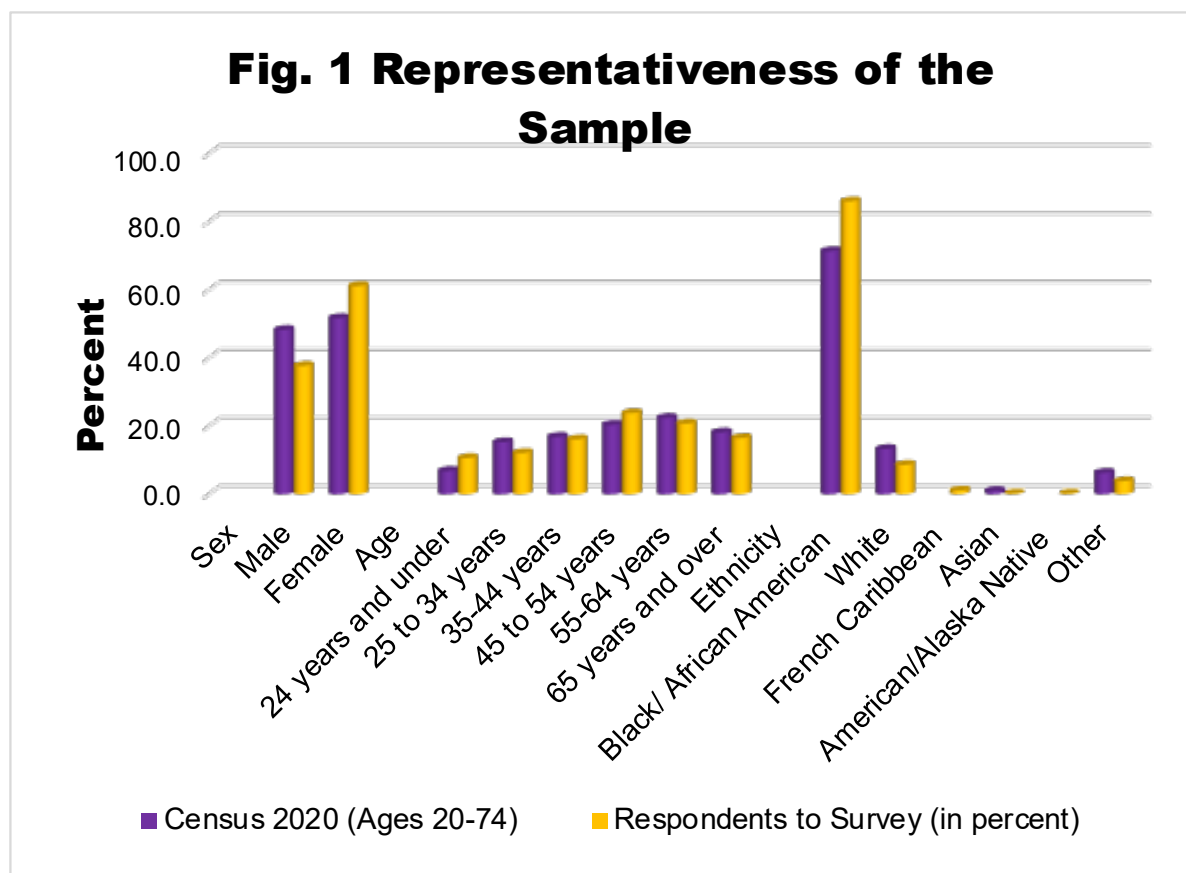
A multidisciplinary team was responsible for designing the survey instruments. This group included the Associate Director of Cooperative Extension Services on the Albert A. Sheen Campus, the Acting Assistant Director of Cooperative Extension Services on the Orville Kean Campus, the Bureau Chief of Fisheries at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the former Director of ECC, and the Center's Statistician. Drawing on their combined expertise in agriculture, fisheries, and survey research, the team developed a comprehensive questionnaire tailored to the objectives of the study.

Home Gardeners and Community Farmers Survey

The first component of data collection focused on home gardeners and community farmers. A cluster sampling approach was used, targeting participants at two large, well-attended community events: the Agriculture and Food Fair on St. Croix (February 16, 2025) and Afternoon on the Green on St. Thomas (March 16, 2025). Thirty minute time periods were used as clusters. During the selected time periods respondents were randomly selected to participate. This method enabled the team to gather responses from a broad, diverse population of home and community gardeners in an efficient, logistically feasible manner.

Cluster sampling at community events is increasingly recognized as an effective strategy for reaching dispersed or informally organized populations, such as home gardeners. The use of this method supports both the breadth and depth of data collection, providing insights into gardening practices, challenges, and production levels without requiring a full census of the home gardening population.

Table 1. Representativeness of the Sample			
Demographics	Census 2020 (Ages 20-74)	Respondents to Survey (in percent)	Difference
Sex			
Male	48.3	37.7	-10.6
Female	51.7	61.2	9.5
Age			
24 years and under	6.9	10.6	3.8
25 to 34 years	15.3	12.1	-3.2
35-44 years	16.9	16.1	-0.7
45 to 54 years	20.4	23.9	3.5
55-64 years	22.4	20.7	-1.7
65 years and over	18.2	16.5	-1.7
Ethnicity			
Black/ African American	71.4	86.0	14.6
White	13.3	8.6	-4.7
French Caribbean		1.1	-
Asian	1.0	0.2	-0.8
American/Alaska Native		0.2	-
Other	6.3	3.9	-2.4



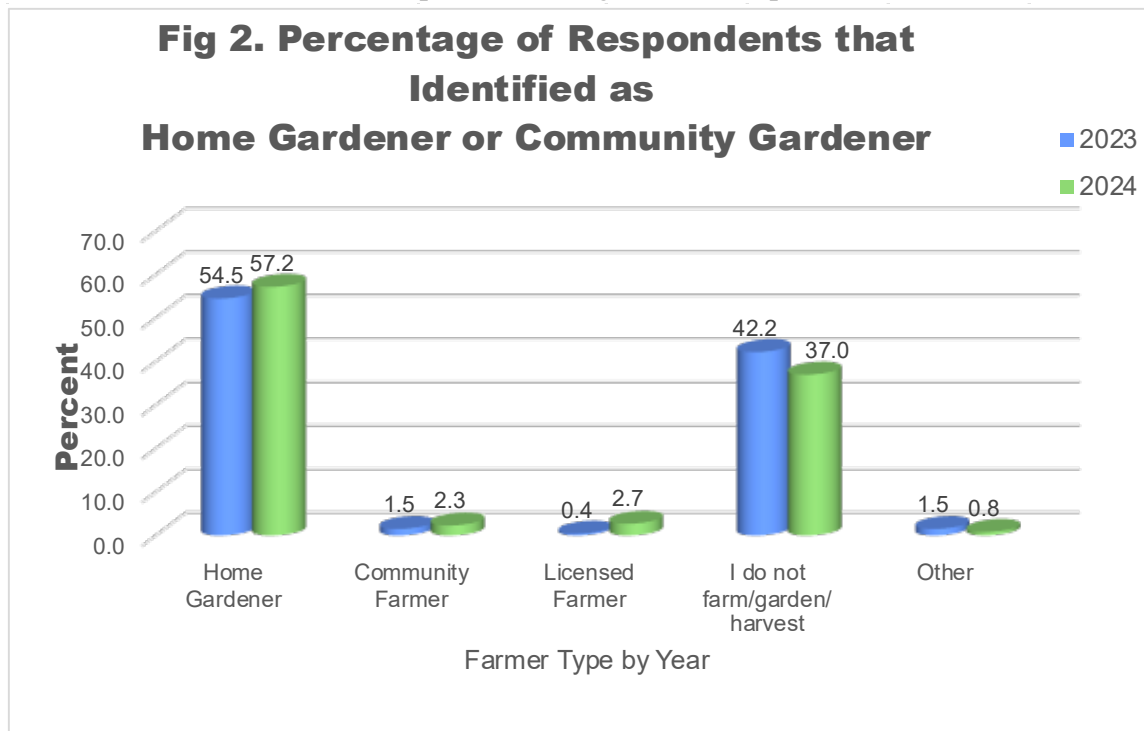
Overall the randomly selected sample is representative of the USVI population by age. For each age cohort, the difference between the sample and the general population is less than 4%. However, persons that identified as Black and females are present in the sample at a higher proportion than the general population.

According to the 2020 Census Black/African Americans make up 71% of the population however they make up 86% of the sample. Females make up 52% of the population however they make up 61% of the sample.

Table 2. Farmer Type by Year

	Total	2023	2024	Percent Change
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	
Home Gardener	55.8	54.5	57.2	5.0
Community Farmer	1.9	1.5	2.3	53.3
Licensed Farmer	1.5	0.4	2.7	575.0
I do not farm/garden/ harvest	39.6	42.2	37.0	-12.3
Other	1.1	1.5	0.8	-46.7
N	525	268	257	

Note: Positive numbers in the percent change column represent an increase.



In 2024, there were increases in the percentage of respondents that indicated that they were home gardeners, community farmers and licensed farmers. The percentage of home gardeners raised from 55% to 57%. This represents a 5% percentage change. Community farmers only represented a very small portion of the sample, however their percentages increased by over 50%, from 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent. The most remarkable increase was in the area of licensed farmers. In 2023, less than one percent of the respondents were licensed farmers, however in 2024 this percentage increased to almost 3 percent.

Table 3. How Much of What is Produced is Consumed Locally?

Field Crops consumed locally			
Total	2023	2024	Percent Change
None	3.1	4.8	52%
Less than 25%	21.9	12.7	-42%
25% to 49%	15.6	17.5	12%
50% to 75%	9.4	7.9	-15%
More than 75%	50.0	57.1	14%
N	32	63	
Vegetables consumed locally			
Total	2024	2025	Percent Change
None	0.9	1.6	79%
Less than 25%	11.7	18.5	58%
25% to 49%	7.2	19.4	169%
50% to 75%	6.3	4.0	-36%
More than 75%	73.9	56.5	-24%
N	111	124	
Fruits consumed locally			
Total	2024	2025	Percent Change
None	0.0	0.8	
Less than 25%	6.9	14.3	107%
25% to 49%	9.2	21.4	133%
50% to 75%	5.7	6.3	10%
More than 75%	78.2	57.1	-27%
N	87	126	
Livestock/Poultry/Eggs consumed locally			
Total	2024	2025	Percent Change
None	0.0	5.6	
Less than 25%	25.0	16.7	-33%
25% to 49%	0.0	38.9	
50% to 75%	0.0	0.0	
More than 75%	75.0	38.9	-48%
N	12	18	

Fig 3a. Percent of Field Crops Consumed Locally

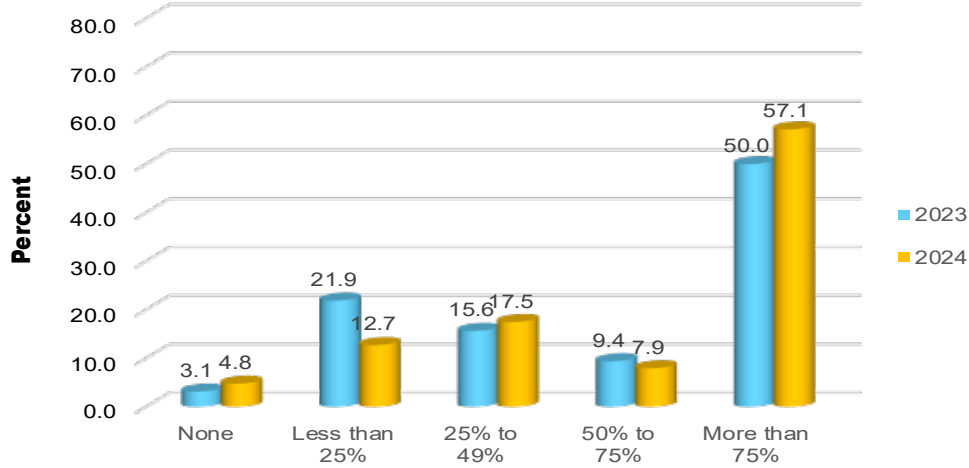


Fig 3b. Percent of Vegetables Consumed Locally

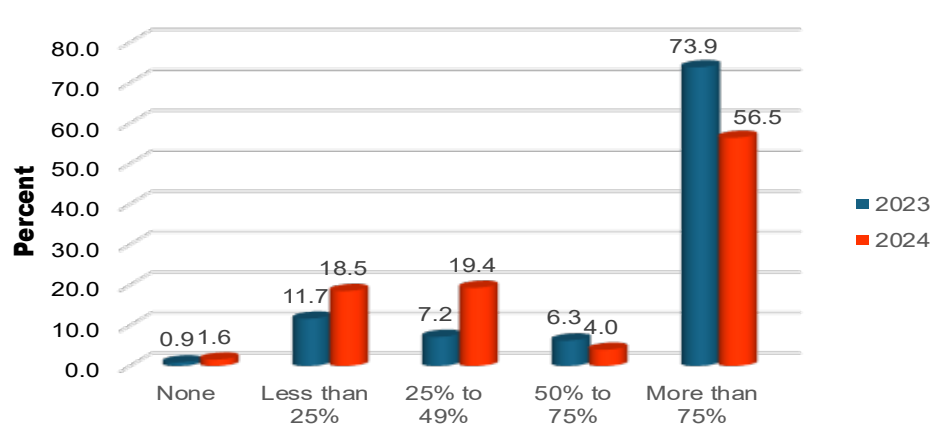
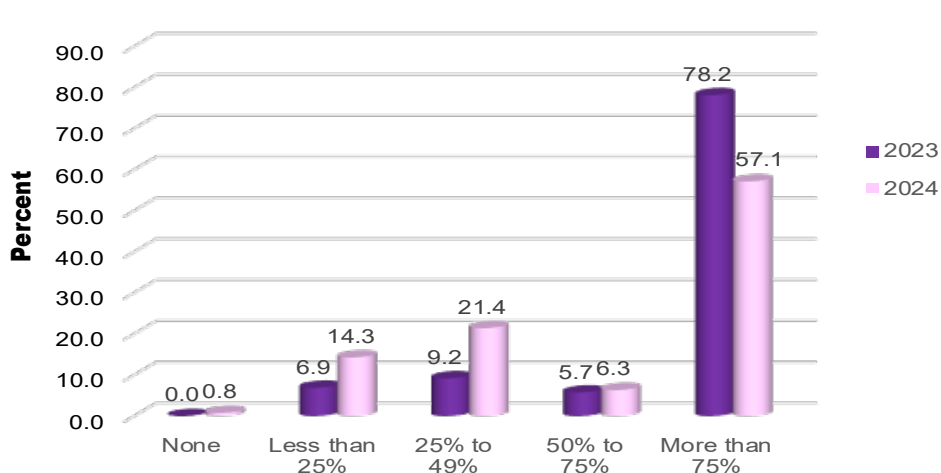
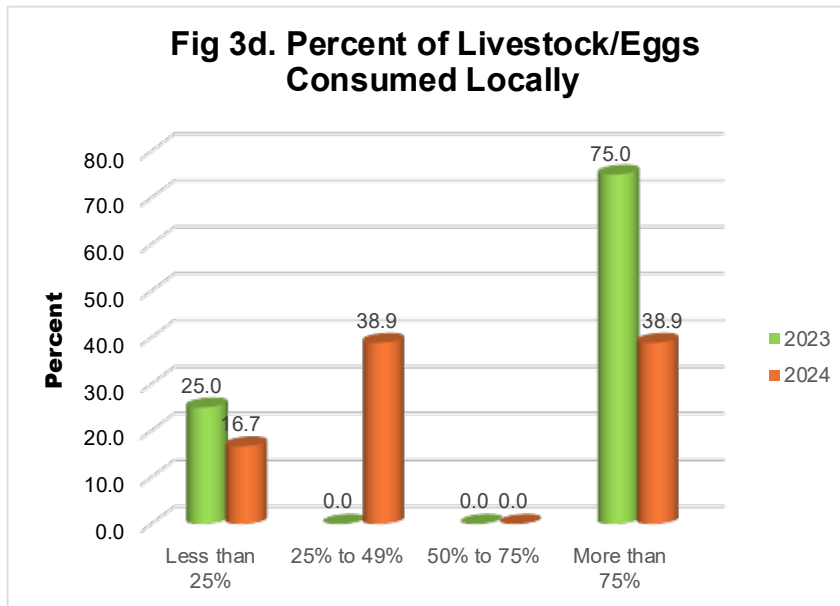


Fig 3c. Percent of Fruits Consumed Locally





In 2024, there was a drop in the percentage of fruits, vegetables and livestock consumed locally. In 2023, there were more respondents reporting that 50% or more of their production was consumed locally. This could possibly be due to a surplus in production. The table on production shows that there was an increase in the production of many items.

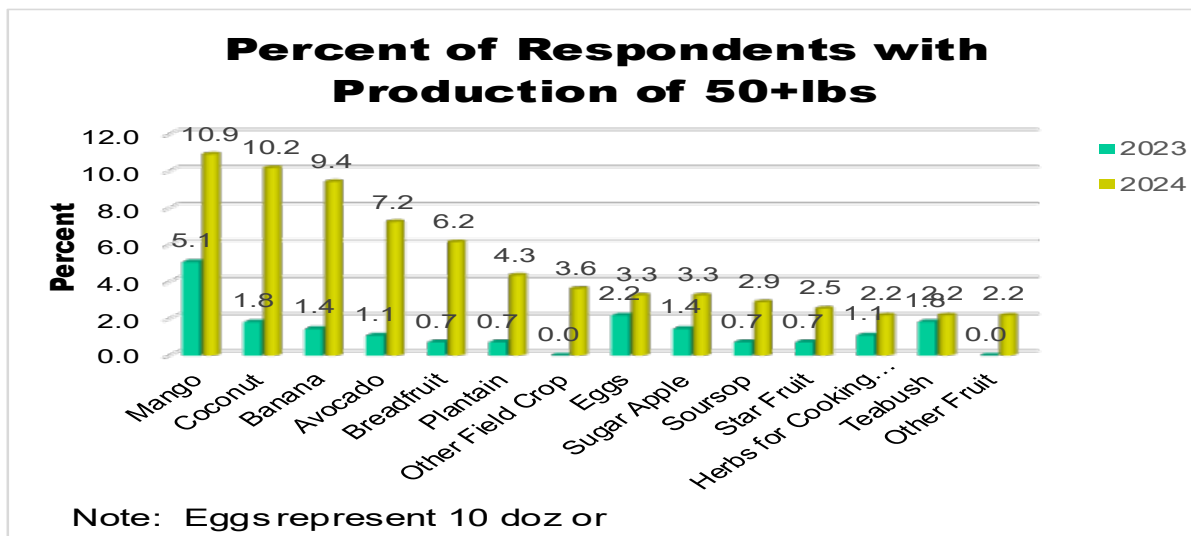
Table 4. Crops with the highest production in lbs by Year							
2023							
Crop Harvested	N	Total	None	Less than 10lbs	10-49lbs	50-99lbs	100 or more lbs
Total		100.0	98.3	0.8	0.7	0.2	0.0
Mango	276	100.0	85.5	2.5	6.9	2.9	2.2
Coconut	276	100.0	96.4	1.1	0.7	1.4	0.4
Banana	276	100.0	91.3	4.0	3.3	1.4	0.0
Avocado	276	100.0	92.8	3.6	2.5	1.1	0.0
Breadfruit	276	100.0	97.5	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.0
Plantain	276	100.0	97.5	1.4	0.4	0.7	0.0
Other Field Crop	276	100.0	99.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Eggs	276	100.0	96.0	1.1	0.7	0.4	1.8
Sugar Apple	276	100.0	90.9	3.6	4.0	0.7	0.7
Soursop	276	100.0	93.8	1.8	3.6	0.7	0.0
Star Fruit	276	100.0	96.7	0.7	1.8	0.4	0.4
Herbs for Cooking	274	100.0	77.0	18.2	3.6	0.4	0.7
Teabush	274	100.0	79.6	13.1	5.5	1.8	0.0
Other Fruit	275	100.0	98.5	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.0

Table 4. Crops with the highest production in lbs by Year *continued*

2024							
Crop Harvested	N	Total	None	Less than 10lbs	10-49lbs	50-99lbs	100 or more lbs
Total		100.0	95.7	1.2	1.9	0.8	0.4
Mango	275	100.0	77.1	2.5	9.5	5.8	5.1
Coconut	275	100.0	80.7	4.0	5.1	5.1	5.1
Banana	276	100.0	76.4	5.4	8.7	6.9	2.5
Avocado	276	100.0	83.7	4.0	5.1	4.3	2.9
Breadfruit	276	100.0	90.2	2.2	1.4	5.1	1.1
Plantain	276	100.0	89.9	1.8	4.0	3.3	1.1
Other Field Crop	276	100.0	94.6	0.0	1.8	2.5	1.1
Eggs	276	100.0	94.9	0.4	1.4	1.4	1.8
Sugar Apple	276	100.0	82.6	3.3	10.9	3.3	0.0
Soursop	276	100.0	83.0	3.3	10.9	2.2	0.7
Star Fruit	275	100.0	93.1	1.1	3.3	2.2	0.4
Herbs for Cooking	275	100.0	71.6	13.5	12.7	2.2	0.0
Teabush	275	100.0	66.5	16.4	14.9	1.5	0.7
Other Fruit	276	100.0	93.1	2.2	2.5	1.1	1.1

Table 4.1 Proportion of Respondents Harvesting 50lbs or More by Year

Crop Harvested	2023	2024	Percent Change
Total	0.2	1.2	6.5
Mango	5.1	10.9	115.1
Coconut	1.8	10.2	462.0
Banana	1.4	9.4	550.0
Avocado	1.1	7.2	566.7
Breadfruit	0.7	6.2	750.0
Plantain	0.7	4.3	500.0
Other Field Crop	0.0	3.6	
Eggs (10 or more doz)	2.2	3.3	50.0
Sugar Apple	1.4	3.3	125.0
Soursop	0.7	2.9	300.0
Star Fruit	0.7	2.5	251.3
Herbs for Cooking	1.1	2.2	99.3
Teabush	1.8	2.2	19.6
Other Fruit	0.0	2.2	



Most crops saw an increase in the 50–99 lbs category in 2024. Breadfruit, Avocado, Banana and Plantain saw the biggest increase in production over the 2023-2024 period. Coconut and breadfruit are also items with high production in lbs. While teabush and herbs are light weight, their production is formidable. About 2% of the respondents report producing 50lbs or more. About 2 out of every 10 people produce tea bush and herbs.

Farmers and Fishermen Survey – Year Two

In the second year of the study, the Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) continued its efforts to collect high-quality data from commercial farmers and fishermen across the U.S. Virgin Islands. A list of licensed farmers was provided to ECC. DPNR also provided a list, however it included only those fishers that gave consent to share their contact information.

Data collection was conducted using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), a method that has proven effective for this survey population. The ECC’s centralized CATI facility at the University of the Virgin Islands allowed for real-time data entry and validation during the interviews. The system also ensured secure handling of all participant information and maintained strict confidentiality protocols throughout the process.

Feedback from fishers, farmers, and other stakeholders indicated that the annual production reports submitted by farmers to the Department of Agriculture, along with the landings submitted by fishers to DPNR, should be integrated into the analysis. We have been told these reports will be available by September 30, 2025, following their respective reporting cycles. When these administrative records are collected, they will be integrated into the report on famers and fishers.

For this year's survey, the ECC successfully interviewed **166** commercial farmers, **28** commercial fishermen and 3 persons who are both farmer and fisher who met the following inclusion criteria: (1) licensed as a farmer or fisherman in 2024, and (2) actively engaged in growing fruits, vegetables, or crops, or in raising livestock or poultry. The interviews were conducted between April 12 and May 3, 2025.

Integrating production reports from farmers with landing data from fishers will strengthen the reliability of information on agricultural and fishing activities across the Territory. This, in turn, supports the broader objectives of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan by enabling more informed decision-making and effective policy development.

TAP Pilot Training Programs

BUILDING USVI's CAPACITY TO SECURE EXTRAMURAL FUNDING FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY EFFORTS

Developed by:

Jessica Venable, PhD, Thorn Run Partners

Ali Mohammad, PhD, Thorn Run Partners

Rick Nader, PhD University of the Virgin Islands



Urgent Need

97% OF USVI'S FOOD IS IMPORTED, CREATING ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, & FOOD SECURITY RISKS.

A food sovereignty approach increases resilience to crises, helps mitigate the impacts of climate variability, bolsters economic self-sufficiency, and ensures that people live in dignity and harmony with the environment.

TAP focuses on agriculture diversification and innovation in ways to produce, protect, and promote crops that will be resilient to climate variabilities.



Urgent Need

97% OF USVI'S FOOD IS IMPORTED, CREATING ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, & FOOD SECURITY RISKS.

- ▶ Focusing on food for people
- ▶ Building knowledge & skills
- ▶ Working with nature
- ▶ Valuing food providers
- ▶ Localizing food systems
- ▶ Putting control locally



Challenges

The Virgin Islands faces significant challenges in implementing TAP, particularly in advancing **Related High Priority Project #5: Enhanced Grant Writing**.

Despite strong community knowledge and expertise, we have not made sufficient progress in securing and managing external funding for agricultural initiatives.

Coordination

Limited collaboration & communication

Funding

Limited resources for grant seeking

Engagement

Challenges in organizing & mobilizing community

Execution

Challenges in transforming strategic vision into actionable, measurable outcomes





TAP Fellows Program

PILOT TRAINING PROGRAM #1



TAP Grants Academy

PILOT TRAINING PROGRAM #2



Pilot Training Program #1

The **TAP Fellows Program** is a targeted leadership development training initiative that transforms how we develop local grantsmanship capacity.



Select and support innovative doers from TAP Working Group



Provide comprehensive leadership training as the foundation for enhanced grant-seeking capacity



Create a sustainable “train the trainer” model for developing expertise that can be applied to other TAP priorities

Initial Focus

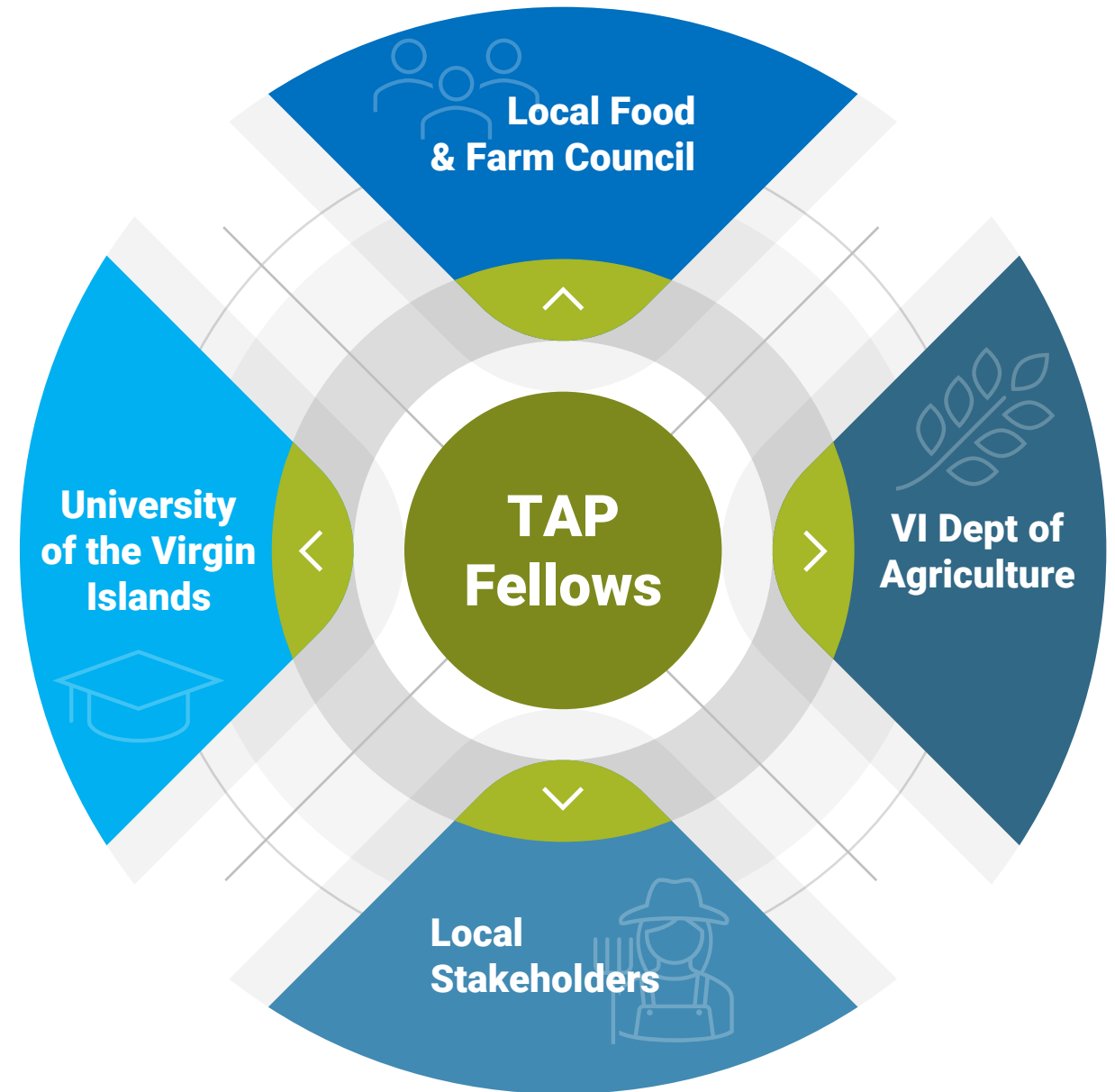
TAP FELLOWS PROGRAM

Core Training Curriculum	Practical Implementation	Community Integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Leadership & empowerment▶ Communication & stakeholder engagement▶ Project management & delegation▶ Team building & collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Individualized consulting & guidance▶ Mentored project design & development▶ Stakeholder outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Bridge between LFFC, UVI, VIDA, & community stakeholders▶ Lead community workshops & engagement activities▶ Build collaborative teams for grant development▶ Serve as ambassadors for next Fellow cohort

Design

TAP FELLOWS PROGRAM

- ▶ 2 fellows selected from the TAP Working Group
- ▶ Fellows receive targeted leadership training and technical support from grants consultants
- ▶ Each fellow receives a 1-year honorarium of \$15,000



Pilot Training Program #2

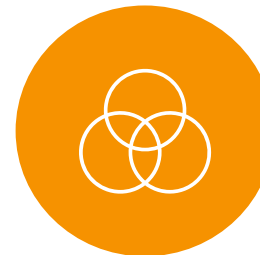
The **TAP Grants Academy** is a structured training initiative designed to broaden grantsmanship expertise among agricultural stakeholders, ensuring long-term funding success for TAP priorities.



Scalable training program that starts with TAP Working Group then expands to other groups



Combines instruction, mentorship, and hands-on practice to build essential skills



Leverages the TAP Fellows Program “train the trainer” model to reach a broader pool of stakeholders

Initial Focus

TAP GRANTS ACADEMY

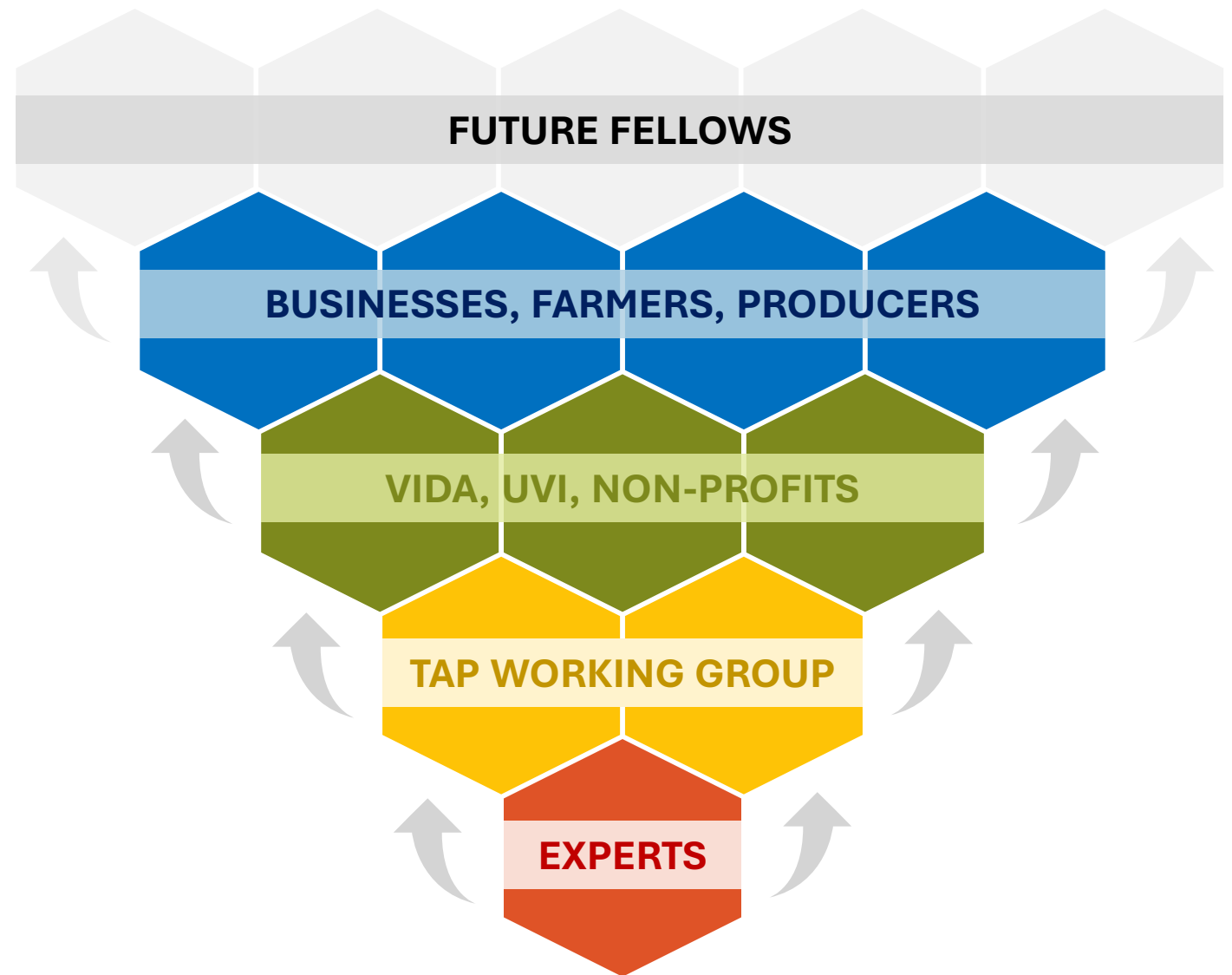
Core Training Curriculum	Practical Implementation	Community Integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Grant readiness▶ Proposal writing▶ Proposal management & compliance▶ Collaboration & partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Guided grant proposal development▶ Mentored project teams▶ Technical assistance for writing strategy, & review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Fellows serve as mentors to Academy participants▶ Participants host community workshops to share knowledge▶ Academy alumni form peer network to solidify local expertise



Design

TAP GRANTS ACADEMY

- ▶ Phase 1: TAP Working Group members receive foundational grantsmanship training
- ▶ Phase 2: Expansion to non-profits, farmers, & businesses
- ▶ Phase 3: Continued mentorship & leadership pipeline development



Program Outcomes and Impact

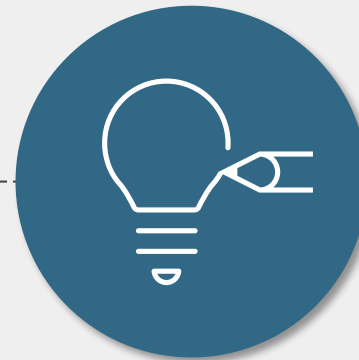
MEASURES OF SUCCESS



Number of proposals
for extramural funding
developed, submitted



Level, diversity of
stakeholder
engagement



Knowledge & skills
transfer to the
broader community



Extramural funding
secured for TAP
initiatives





LFCC Discussion & Insights

- ▶ How can we strengthen these proposed elements to better serve our community?
- ▶ What additional considerations should we address?
- ▶ How can Council members contribute to the program's success?
- ▶ What timeline would best support successful implementation?

VIDE Sustainability & Agricultural Education (SAE) Report July 2025

July 17,2025

State Curriculum & Instruction

Sustainability & Agricultural Education Director

Cydney Meadows



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Overview

Aligned with the Virgin Islands Territorial Agriculture Plan (TAP, Act 8404 and 8700) The Virgin Islands Department of Education's Sustainability and Agricultural Education (SAE) Division is proud to lead transformative initiatives that empower students, educators, and communities to build resilient food systems and environmental stewardship. Guided by the TAP , our programs integrate STEM, cultural heritage, and hands-on learning to address food security, climate resilience, and career readiness.

From soil testing workshops for the public to cutting-edge Freight Farm technology, we are cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders while honoring the USVI's traditions. Partnerships with agencies like UVI, DPNR, LFFC, VIC, FEFA, FFA and Women in Agriculture amplify our impact, ensuring resources and expertise reach every district. With a finalized curriculum awaiting Board approval and a published SAE Calendar to keep communities engaged, we are laying the groundwork for long-term sustainability—one student, one garden, and one innovation at a time.

Key Achievements in Sustainability & Agricultural Education

1. Strengthening FFA & Sustainability Initiatives

The Virgin Islands is in “good standing” with the National FFA Organization. We have secured advanced sustainability materials (data sensors based) created through Microsoft's partnership with the FFA for the upcoming school year. These resources will empower students with hands-on learning opportunities in agriculture and environmental stewardship, ensuring the next generation is equipped to tackle local and global challenges.

2. Interactive ECO FAIR, Water & Soil Testing and Tree Grafting Workshops

Collaboration with the STE(A)M Division, Curriculum & Instruction (C&I) Directors, STEM summer camp partners, the Teacher of the Year, and UVI MANNRS, SAE executed engaging workshops on tree grafting and water and soil testing. This initiative inspired young women to pursue science careers and environmental problem-solving, fostering a passion for sustainability.

Over 450 students engaged in sustainability through immersive activities at the Eco Fair, hosted by C&I's SAE and DVICE programs. From interactive soil testing demonstrations for USVI-grown foods to dynamic workshops, the event ignited curiosity about agriculture, ecology, and food security—proving that learning thrives when students ‘get their hands dirty’ in real-world problem-solving.

3. Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) Activation

CTSOs (Career and Technical Student Organizations) like FFA, MANRRS, and 4-H (which is a youth development organization but often partners with agricultural education) play a crucial role in preparing students for careers through leadership, hands-on learning, and workforce readiness. VIDE SAE utilizes these organizations enhance classroom instruction by providing interscholastic competition events, real-world experiences, conventions, and networking and professional development opportunities.

4. Strategic Educational Partnerships

We cultivated impactful collaborations with organizations such as WAPA, UVI, CORE Lionfish Awareness, St Croix Animal Welfare Animal Center, Ecoschools, and DPNR. These partnerships enrich agricultural education with expertise, resources, and real-world applications.

5. Inspiring Future Environmental Stewards

Through initiatives like the Capstone with the Ag Business Center, Practical Practicum Practice, Kallaloo Plant & Recipe Exploration, Botanical Gardens' Mango Melee seed distribution, and grafting classes, we're nurturing a generation committed to protecting our natural resources and food systems.

6. Freight Farm: A Mobile Classroom for Innovation

The Freight Farm has landed and it will revolutionize agricultural education—allowing the students to learn to grow hydroponically in the equivalent of 2.5 acres of produce in a compact, soil-free system. Students Territory-wide will engage in hydroponics, food security, and STEM learning, thanks to funding from the CGA and leadership from VIDE's St. Croix C&I Team and SAE Division.

7. Elevating Agriculture as a STEM Pathway

We supported the Ag Fair and Territory wide Science Fairs, showcasing agriculture as an enriching and viable STEM career path. Additionally, SAE extended resources to non-public/private schools, ensuring all students have access to agricultural education.

8. Expanding School Food Orchards with Women in Agriculture & VIDA Tree Council

Women in Agriculture and the VIDA Tree Community Council are partnering with SAE to establish food orchards on public school campuses Territory-wide. This initiative allows for community resilience, land management tools, and food sovereignty, transforming schools into hubs of sustainable food production.

9. Curriculum Development & Upcoming Approvals

The SAE curriculum—including the Practical Practice Practicum and Senior Farmer Capstone (a collaborative effort with the Ag Business Center)—is finalized and pending approval by the Board of Education. Once implemented, it will provide students with a structured, career-ready pathway in agriculture and sustainability.

10. SAE calendar and online presence: Connecting Communities to Agriculture

The SAE website, goopen, and calendar are now live, offering parents, teachers, students, and community members easy access to Territory-wide and national Supervised Agricultural Experiences (known as SAE by the FFA (Future Farmers of America)). This connectivity fosters engagement and ensures everyone can participate in the growing movement for sustainability education. SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience) is a key component of agricultural education that encourages students to engage in experiential learning outside the classroom. By integrating SAE into the calendar students and parents are empowered to take ownership of their career development with their peers and appropriate mentors.

Curriculum Development

The SAE curriculum is a comprehensive framework designed to support food security and sovereignty in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It provides educators and students with the tools to engage in sustainable agricultural practices while integrating industry-aligned standards. A structured system for feedback and evaluation has been established to track progress, benchmarks, and allows teachers to share their needs, what works well for them, and enhance and share lesson plans (<https://forms.office.com/r/EEQXr9XdSt>).

Key components include:

- **Exploratory courses** at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels to introduce students to agribusiness and assist in career planning.
- **Job-preparatory instruction** at the secondary level, including cooperative education, work experience, and on-the-job training.
- **Creation of a Senior Capstone Project** to create a business tool for students to utilize and execute.
- **Advanced training pathways** in agricultural production, agriscience, agribusiness, agritourism, and forestry.
- **Integration of the National FFA Organization (FFA)** as a Career Technical Student Organization (CTSO) to provide leadership training and reinforce agricultural and technical skills.
- **Implementation of Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE)** through directed laboratory experiences, student projects, cooperative education, and internships.

Conclusion

Our vision is to continue to grow an industry-leading, inquiry-based curriculum and teacher education that honors the Virgin Islands' heritage while preparing students for a future of food stability, sovereignty, and prosperity. Through the SOS Council, we are engaging schools with existing gardens, providing support, connecting kitchen managers, and providing professional development for educators. The SAE HUB supports agricultural integration in classrooms with resources, events, and funding opportunities. The sustainability and Agricultural Education program has been structured to sustain long term as it is built on a strong foundation.

This transformative program will continue to grow by equipping students with the knowledge and skills to thrive in environmentally conscious careers while strengthening food security across the Virgin Islands. Continued legislative, education, and community support will ensure the long-term success of the program, fostering a resilient and self-sufficient future for our students and communities.

This program is designed to achieve real results by making agricultural education practical, accessible, and deeply connected to the daily lives of students and educators, no matter their subject area, in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The SAE curriculum provides a structured yet adaptable approach that allows educators to seamlessly integrate sustainability and agriculture into any classroom setting. Rooted in the heritage and future potential of the USVI, the SAE program ensures that students build a strong foundation in agricultural knowledge while engaging in hands-on, inquiry-based learning experiences, this allows our students to grow academically AND increase food sovereignty and security.



PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENT FUND

The Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council proudly announces that the Review and Selection Committee has finalized the selection of grant recipients. We received an enthusiastic response from farmers, fishers, and various organizations, and we deeply appreciate your active participation in the Public-Private Partnership Investment Funding Application process for Fiscal Year 2024.

**Thank you for your dedication
to enhancing your industries and
contributing to our shared prosperity.**

\$500,00.00

Available Funding

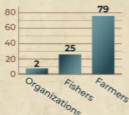
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Applications

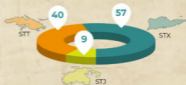


APPLICANT DEMOGRAPHICS 2024

Applicant Types



Applicants from Each Island



Funding Classification

- Tier 1 Funding**
Suitable for beginning farmers or fishers with 0 – 5 years of business experience.
- Tier 2 Funding**
Designed for experienced farmers or fishers with 5 or more years of business experience.

Requested Funding

Tier 1 and Tier 2 applicants collectively requested
\$4,683,541.46 in funding.





PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENT FUND

2024 GRANT WINNERS

Thank you to all applicants!

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of the Virgin Islands for providing the funding that made this grant possible. Your support is instrumental in advancing our local food and farming community on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.

Recipient Name / Business	Tier	Island	Type	Amount
Jacklyn M. Frett	Tier 2	STT	Farmer	\$40,000.00
Trevor Warner / Pleasant Valley Farm	Tier 2	STX	Farmer	\$57,000.00
Roniel Allemberth / VI Honey Man	Tier 2	STX	Farmer	\$54,616.00
Leonardo Perez / Bordeaux Botanica	Tier 1	STJ	Farmer	\$42,500.00
Dean Leonard / Ideal Farm, LLC	Tier 2	STT	Farmer	\$65,370.00
Derick Hodge / Staff of Life	Tier 2	STT	Farmer	\$50,000.00
Alexander Zimmerman / Fishwater Charters	Tier 1	STX	Fisher	\$55,000.00
Lenn Bully / Strictly Roots LLC. Farms	Tier 2	STX	Farmer	\$25,000.00
Roy Rodgers / VI Farmers Alliance, Inc	Tier 2	STX	Org	\$50,000.00
Errol A. Chichester	Tier 1	STX	Farmer	\$21,081.00
Jamie Phillips Kennedy / JP Roots Farm	Tier 2	STJ	Farmer	\$15,000.00
Eric Ahrens / Mycelium Man	Tier 1	STX	Farmer	\$25,000.00

Total Funds Awarded \$500,567.00

Winner Process for Fiscal Year 2024

Those approved for funding will receive detailed instructions on the next steps, including the timeline for fund disbursement, requirements for the LFFC Funding Agreement, and any additional documentation needed. Regular updates will be provided via email and our online portal to ensure recipients are always aware of the application's status and any necessary actions.



An Initiative of the Virgin Islands Agriculture Plan



Act# 8700 35th Legislature of the USVI

Pursuant to section 6 of Act #8700, the USVI EDA was allocated funds to support this grant.

Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan Mandate No. 2 Business Model: Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund

The Fiscal Year 2024 Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund, which supports the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan's Mandate Number 2 has successfully implemented the 2024 Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund.

The 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands allocated \$500,000.00 to the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to enhance local food systems and advance agricultural and fishing development. This initiative has proudly fulfilled Mandate No. 2 of the Agricultural Plan's objectives.