



TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
AGRICULTURE

35TH LEGISLATURE
OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Good afternoon, Chairman James and members of the Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture and other members of the 35th Legislature present, other testifiers, members of the press, persons in the viewing and listening audience, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is David Hall, President of the University of the Virgin Islands, and it is indeed an honor for me to appear before this Committee to provide testimony regarding the University's School of Agriculture. I want to thank Dean Usman Adamu for his leadership of the School of Agriculture, and for assisting me in developing this testimony.

Though the School of Agriculture was established on June 22, 2020, by the UVI Board of Trustees, the University has operated as a land grant University for numerous years. The Cooperative Extension Service Program and the Agricultural Experiment Station were the anchors of the University's outreach and research contributions to the Territory. Especially through its aquaponics and hydroponics expertise and pioneering systems, UVI developed an international reputation in these areas. Members of the Cooperative Extension Service's program developed an outstanding reputation among the farming community and have consistently been the leaders of agriculture and a main force behind the implementation of the annual Agriculture and Food Fair.

However, despite these successes, the University was not able to offer degrees in the field of agriculture. This weakness was addressed when the 33rd Legislature provided funding to create the School of Agriculture, with primary responsibility for fulfilling the Land-Grant mission of the institution in three areas: Research, Extension, and Teaching. The school embraces its Land-Grant mission of providing innovative and cutting-edge research, extension, and teaching programs that respond to the educational, social, economic, and environmental needs of the citizens of the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean region.

The School of Agriculture has three departments and two units with approximately fifty employees. The three departments are the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES), the research wing of the school; the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), the outreach and engagement wing of the school; and the Agriculture Academic Programs (AAP), the academic teaching wing of the school. The two units are Communication, Technology, and Distance/Online Learning; and the Budget and Personnel. The units provide technical and professional support services to faculty and staff in the school.

The leadership team of the School of Agriculture consists of the following individuals:

1. Dr. Usman Adamu, Dean and Director
2. Mr. Stafford Crossman, Associate Director of CES
3. Dr. Thomas Zimmerman, Associate Director of AES
4. Dr. Louis Petersen, Assistant Director, St. Thomas/St. John Extension District
5. Ms. Raquel Santiago, Assistant Director of Budget and Personnel
6. Mr. Marthious Clavier, Assistant Director of Communication, Technology, Distance/Online Learning

Funding

The work of the School of Agriculture is supported by a combination of federal and local funds. The federal funds for agricultural research work comes from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture in the form of capacity grants known as Hatch Regular, Hatch Multi-State, and McIntire-Stennis, and these funds are matched with UVI’s local funds. Also, the federal funds for the Cooperative Extension Service work comes from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture in the form of a capacity grant known as Smith-Lever and UVI matches it with its local funds. The federal funds, along with UVI’s matching funds, support the operation budgets of the AES and CES. The local matching funds are required by the U.S. Congress for continuing funding of agricultural research and extension work at UVI.

The AES and CES operating budgets for FY 23 are as follows:

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION			
Fund Name	U.S. Department of Agriculture Allocation for FY 2023	UVI Local Funds	Total
Hatch Regular Research Funds	\$1,835,768.00	\$558,188.00	\$2,393,956.00
Hatch Multi-state Funds	\$173,317.00	\$64,313.00	\$237,630.00
McIntire-Stennis Funds	\$92,432.00	\$0.00	\$92,432.00
TOTAL	\$2,101,517.00	\$622,501.00	\$2,724,018.00
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE			
Fund Name	U.S. Department of Agriculture Allocation for FY 2023	UVI Local Funds	Total
Smith Lever Funds	\$1,951,732.00	\$631,593.00	\$2,853,325.00

The Agriculture Academic Teaching Programs is entirely supported by the local funds that have been appropriated by the VI Legislature in the amount of \$989,912 annually since 2018. As a result of this funding support, the Agriculture Academic Programs’ development of certificates, associate degree, and bachelor’s degree levels are progressing very well. Presently, twelve programs have been completed and approved by the UVI Board of Trustees. This funding has allowed the School of Agriculture to recruit and hire initial essential personnel needed to start work on developing the new agricultural sciences curricula and courses. Five Ph.D. tenure-track teaching faculty in Animal Science, Agricultural Business/Economics, Aquaculture, Plant and Soil Science, and Horticulture were hired along with three professional staff including a full-time Student Recruitment Specialist.

Since the School of Agriculture was established only about two years ago, consequential, and measurable progress is being made regarding the development, approval, and offering new agriculture academic programs. A total of twenty-three students are currently enrolled in various programs of the School of Agriculture. We are proud of all these students, and as some of your heard at the School of Agriculture Legislature Day, one of Governor Bryan’s daughters is enrolled in the program. I highlight her only because, as she indicated that day, her decision to return to the Territory was due in great part to the University’s ability to offer degrees in agriculture. This is an important message because it reminds all of us that the more attractive we can make the University, the greater our opportunities to retain and attract Virgin Islanders who are looking other places to fulfill their academic dreams. We need to keep our talent here and this program is a shining example of how the Legislature and the University can work together to achieve this goal.

The School of Agriculture so far has developed and is currently offering the following twelve academic programs:

- 1) Six Certificates
 - Aquaculture
 - Agrotourism
 - Horticulture
 - Agricultural Business
 - General Agriculture
 - Forestry and Nursery Management
- 2) Four Associate of Applied Science Degrees
 - General Agriculture
 - Agroecology
 - Agricultural Business
 - Horticulture
- 3) Two Bachelor of Science Degrees
 - Aquaponics
 - Horticulture

Three more Bachelor of Science degree program curricula in Agricultural Business, Animal Science, and Agroecology have been completed and are expected to be presented to the UVI Board of Trustees at its next meeting. If approved, the School will start offering them in the Fall of the new academic year.

Work is also in progress for two new certificates in Animal Science and Cannabis Social Science, four new Associate of Applied science degrees in Animal Science, Cannabis Biotechnology, Cannabis Social Science, and Regulatory Science, and two Bachelor of Science degrees in Regulatory Science and General Agriculture.

Progress

Considerable progress is being made in the rebuilding efforts of the agricultural research and extension facilities on-campus that were destroyed by the hurricanes as two or three constructions including the shade house, sheep building, and aquaculture/aquaponics facilities are either completed or near completion.

Grants

In addition to the annual capacity grants (Hatch and Smith-Lever) the University is entitled to and is receiving from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture as a Land-Grant institution to fund AES and CES work in the Territory. The School of Agriculture's faculty and staff are constantly pursuing other sources of funding through grants and contracts to support their work.

In Fiscal Year 2021, a total of sixteen grant proposals with a combined budget of \$10,779,897 were submitted to various funding agencies by the faculty and staff of the School. In Fiscal Year 2022, a total of thirty-two proposals were submitted with a combined budget of \$5,170,550. Many of these proposals were international, multi-year, multi-institutions, and highly integrated involving research, extension, and teaching. Here are some names of the projects:

1. Understating Reduced-Risk Pesticides and Best Farming Practices
2. Evaluating sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) varieties for production in Florida
3. UVI AgDiscovery Summer Enrichment Program
4. Evaluation of the African High Protein Tropical Winged Bean Project
5. GRO (Guided Research Opportunities) in STEM: Partnership to Advance Minority Graduate Enrollment in Agricultural and Life Sciences Education
6. Urban and peri-urban agriculture in four cities in the Diorbél Region of Senegal and the United States Virgin Islands: characterization and comparative survey by the Université Alioune Diop (UAD) de Bambey and the University of the Virgin Islands
7. Precision Equipment and Smart Technologies to Enhance Education, Research, and Extension Services of the University of the Virgin Islands
8. Healthy Families, Healthy Youth
9. Development of Wild Cinnamon (*Pimenta Racemosa*) for the USVI Nursery Industry

Challenges

The School of Agriculture is facing three challenges: 1) Damaged research and extension facilities, 2) Need for more office space, and 3) Improved laboratories.

Damaged Research Facilities:

The on-campus research facilities for sheep, aquaculture/aquaponics, fruits, vegetables, and forestry (greenhouses); demonstration garden, post-harvest building, and storage rooms were either destroyed or severely damaged by the two back-to-back hurricanes in 2017. Research work has been grounded because of the downed facilities. The rebuilding efforts of the facilities have taken longer than expected because of the complicated assessment and approval processes of FEMA. However, progress is being made with the rebuilding of the shade house, sheep, and aquaculture/aquaponics facilities, which should be completed within months.

2) More Office Space:

As with numerous programs at the University, space is at a premium. The School of Agriculture is in need of additional space to house faculty and staff, and this will become an even greater priority as the program grows.

3) Enhanced Research and Demonstration Laboratories:

Currently, the School of Agriculture has five laboratories that are in two buildings: small Animal Science and Aquaculture laboratories in AES Building E, and Biotechnology, Plant Sciences, and Family and Consumer Science Food/Nutrition laboratories in Research Extension Center building. The Family and Consumer Science Food/Nutrition laboratory is large enough to be used for both academic instruction and extension teaching/demonstration; however, it needs minor renovation and up-graded appliances. The rest of the four laboratories are designed primarily for research purposes. To meet our current needs for both research and teaching, renovation and up-graded equipment are needed as well.

Despite the above challenges, the University is proud of the progress made by the School of Agriculture in such a brief period. We fully understand that there is a generation of students we must convince to get them to pursue agriculture as their profession. Though this is a challenge, without the support this body provides, we would have nothing to offer these students. Now we have a fighting chance to convince them to stay home and become the future leaders of this critical industry. We are also excited about the Legislature's advocacy and support for the Agriculture Plan and for involving the University in its development. With a vibrant Plan and a vibrant School of Agriculture, the future for agriculture in the Virgin Islands is looking greener every day.

Thank you for listening and I stand ready to answer your questions.