

Chairperson: Economic Development & Agriculture
Vice Chair: Committee Government Operations,
Veterans Affairs & Consumer Protection
Member:
Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public
Safety
Committee on Education and Workforce



Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

#3022 ESTATE GOLDEN ROCK
ST. CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS 00820
TELEPHONE:(340) 712-2246
EMAIL: SENATORJAMES@LEGVI.ORG

The Honorable Senator
JAVAN E. JAMES
★ ★ ★ ★ 35TH LEGISLATURE

TO: Kurell A. Sheridan, JD
Executive Director
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

FROM: Senator Javan E. James, Sr. _____
Chairman, Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture

SUBJECT: Committee Report for Wednesday, February 8, 2023

DATE: March 13, 2023

Pursuant to the Rules of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, please find enclosed the report for the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture hearing, which was held on Wednesday, February 8, 2023, in the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, St. Croix.

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, chaired by Senator Javan E. James, Sr. convened a meeting at 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday, February 8, 2023, in the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, St. Croix. The purpose of the hearing was to receive an update on the overall status of the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, University of the Virgin Islands as well as VI Good Foods, a non-governmental organization (NGO).

Legislative Attendance

Committee Members in Attendance:

The Honorable Javan E. James Sr.	-	Chairman
The Honorable Angel L. Bolques, Jr	-	Vice Chairman
The Honorable Marvin A. Blyden		
The Honorable Diane T. Capehart		
The Honorable Dwayne M. DeGraff		
The Honorable Alma Francis Heyliger		
The Honorable Donna A. Frett-Gregory		

Non-Committee Members in Attendance:

The Honorable Senate President Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
The Honorable Franklin D. Johnson
The Honorable Carla J. Joseph
The Honorable Ray Fonseca

Office of Public Affairs

Eustace Browne – Acting Director
Alwyn Baptiste, Jr.
Alvin Burke, Jr.
Melissa Gustave
Bernard Matthew



@JavanJamesVI

Cont'd.... /2...

Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
February 8, 2023

Legal Counsel

Holly L. Fulkerson Esq.

Facilitator

Ms. Myrna Pickard

Sergeant-at-Arms

Annias Jawahir

Stenographer

Clerk

Jonathan E. James, Jr.

Staff of Senator Javan E. James, Sr.

Andrea Z. Mshila

Jonathan E. James, Jr.

Dwight Cartier

The Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, chaired by Senator Javan E. James, Sr. was called to order at 10:15 a.m.

Chairman James, Sr. recognized the month of February as Black History month and gave a brief history of its conception from Negro History Week to Black History Month. Chairman James took the opportunity to recognize and congratulate our very own three outstanding Virgin Islanders, who are Grammy Award Winners in their fields. These outstanding Virgin Islanders are:

- Theron Thomas who won a Grammy Award for a song he wrote for Lizzo, winning record of the year.
- Masai Harris, another Grammy Award winner who worked on Kabaka Pyramid's Reggae Album of the year "The Kalling", and,
- Cori Alexander Grammy Award Winner Recording Engineer worked on Kirk Franklin Maverick City's Best Gospel winning album called Kingdom.

Chairman James said he was concern about the constant power outages in the US Virgin Islands that is hurting the community. He stated that as leaders it is imperative that these issues plaguing the Water and Power Authority are resolved and he looks forward to the 35th Legislature holding the Authority accountable.

Cont'd.... /3...

Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
February 8, 2023

After Chairman James, Sr. remarks, he requested roll call and the reading of the agenda. Chairman James also thanked the Honorable Senators, both committee as well as non-committee members for attending the meeting.

BLOCK I - 10:00 a.m.

The Committee convened to receive testimony on the overall status of the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture.

Invited Testifier:

The Honorable Positive T. A. Nelson

Commissioner – Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture

Accompanying Commissioner Nelson were:

Deputy Commissioner Rissa Richards

Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture

Ms. Michelle Elliot

Administrator, Fiscal and Personnel Services

Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture

Commissioner Positive T.A. Nelson, of the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture delivered his testimony into the record.

Chairman James Sr. extended to the Senators a total of eight (8) minutes each for their respective line of questioning.

Questions through the Chair:

- Senator DeGraff asked for statistics that shows that food production in the Virgin Islands is on the increase.
- What is the cost of the travel for taking livestock to the St. Thomas abattoir and back to St. Croix?
- Chairman James Sr. requested for a copy of the consistency report mentioned earlier.

At the closure of Block I, Commissioner Positive Nelson thanked Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to present to the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture on the status of the Department of Agriculture and Agriculture in general. He stated that the Department stands ready to support farmers and bring the agriculture productivity forward. He acknowledged that there are challenges, nevertheless food production has increased.

Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture
February 8, 2023

The Committee went into recess at 1:10 p.m.

BLOCK II – 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

INVITED TESTIFIERS:

Dr. David Hall
President – University of the Virgin Islands

Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown
Executive Director
The Virgin Islands Food Coalition

Honorable Positive T. A. Nelson
Commissioner – V.I. Department of Agriculture

The Committee reconvened at 1:26 p.m. and Dr. Hall, read his testimony into the record. President Hall stated that the Agriculture Task Force had met its mandate but spoke of his role as a prospective member of the Agriculture Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Task Force was to develop a plan and submit to the Government and the Legislature and the Advisory Committee is the body that will be responsible for the next step. He stated that more legislation is needed before the Advisory Committee body can start functioning.

Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Browne, Executive Director, also read her testimony into the record. Mrs. Brown highlighted the need to the committee to be successful there would be a need for a diverse member body to be highly skilled as opposed to political appointees. Ms. Sibilly-Brown agreed that they will work in collaboration between entities and stressed the importance of inviting farmers to the table.

Commissioner Nelson was in attendance in the second block as a support in the event there were any questions he could respond to.

Chairman James gave four minutes to each Senator for round of questioning.

In summary President Hall thanked the 34th and 35th Legislature for providing support to this measure. He thanked all sponsors for creating this roadmap for the plan and it was a guidance and the eight mandates that was embedded in the law worked with them.

There being no other business the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.