



## *School of Agriculture*

### *Office of the Dean and Director*

TO: Members of the Economic Development and Agriculture Committee (ED&A) of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands  
Senator Hubert Frederick, Chair  
Senator Angel Bolques, Vice Chair  
Senator Marvin Blyden  
Senator Alma Francis Heyliger  
Senator Marise James  
Senator Franklin Johnson  
Senator Clifford Joseph

FROM: Dr. Usman Adamu  
Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture

DATE: April 16, 2025

SUBJECT: Testimony on the State of Agriculture in the Virgin Islands: Perspective of the UVI School of Agriculture

Good morning, Chairman Frederick, Vice Chairman Blyden and members of the Economic Development and Agriculture Committee (ED&R) and other members of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature present, persons in the viewing and listening audience, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is Usman Adamu, Dean and Director of the UVI School of Agriculture. I want to thank Mr. Stafford Crossman, Associate Director, for the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and Dr. Thomas Zimmerman, Associate Director for the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) for assisting me in developing this testimony.

It is with great pleasure that I appear before this Committee today to provide testimony on the State of Agriculture in the Virgin Islands. This testimony will provide perspective of the UVI School of Agriculture on five key areas. As many of you know, the School of Agriculture was created on June 22, 2022, by the UVI Board of Trustees and funded by the 33<sup>rd</sup> Legislature, with primary responsibility for fulfilling the Land-Grant mission of the University of the Virgin Islands. The Land-Grant mission is centered around research, extension, and teaching.

On the five key areas I was asked to provide perspective on are:

1. The School of Agriculture's role in workforce development and training for future farmers and agricultural professionals.

One of the primary roles of the UVI School of Agriculture is education and training for workforce development of current and future farmers and agricultural scientists/professionals in the territory. The School of Agriculture is fulfilling these roles through its formal academic programs and non-formal educational programs.

The academic program department is currently offering six certificates in Aquaculture, Agrotourism, Horticulture, Agricultural Business, General Agriculture, and Forestry and Nursery Management; four associate of applied science degrees in General Agriculture, Agroecology, Agricultural Business, and Horticulture; and five bachelor of science degrees in Aquaponics, Animal Science, Horticulture, Agroecology, and Agricultural Business. These programs prepare students for professional careers and graduate and professional schools.

The non-formal educational programs are research-based information provided to farmers and other agricultural workers by the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in three programming areas: 1) Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2) 4-H/Family and Consumer Sciences, and 3) Communication and Technology. The Agriculture and Natural Resources programming areas include sustainable agriculture, integrated pest management and pesticide safety education, natural resources and environmental management, livestock production, healthy homes, and urban gardening. The 4-H/Family and Consumer Sciences programming areas include 4-H youth development, basic nutrition education, and marketable skills. The Communication and Technology program areas include using PowerPoint, Excel, Access, Word, Zoom, Teams, Internet, Smartphones, etc.

The CES programs are hands-on demonstrations, workshops, seminars, short courses, site visits, and one-on-one interactions that help farmers and growers improve their practices and increase their productivity.

2. UVI-led research and extension programs aimed at supporting local food production, sustainability, and resilience.

The research and extension programs are the centerpiece of our Land-Grant mission. The research programs are based in the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) of the School of Agriculture where both basic and applied research are conducted in animal science, aquaculture and aquaponics, biotechnology and agroforestry, agronomy, and horticulture. The research projects are all aimed at improving local agriculture and food production in the territory. Scientists in AES are breeding and developing new sorrel that expands production season to now October to May and seeds of these new varieties are available year-round. Fruit production systems for watermelon and sweet corn are being trialed to reduce the intake of fruit sugars and to lower the risk of diabetes in the Virgin Islands. St. Croix White Hair Sheep (SCWHS) are being bred with Doper Sheep to develop larger meatier sheep.

The CES is the outreach unit of the School of Agriculture that is providing the non-formal educational programs for farmers in Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H/Family and Consumer Sciences, and Communication and Technology. These programs

are delivered in the form of workshops, seminars, short courses, and farm visits designed to improve the knowledge and skills of farmers in agriculture and food production methods.

3. Collaboration with local farmers and government agencies, including support for farm-to-table initiatives and community-based agriculture.

The UVI School of Agriculture work is centered around the tripartite Land-Grant mission of research, extension, and teaching. The work of the school is accomplished collaboratively across these three mission areas with input and participation from internal and external stakeholder groups that include departments within the university, local farmers and growers, Virgin Islands departments and agencies, USDA/federal agencies, and other colleges and universities, especially land-grant institutions. Collaboration is enshrined in our USDA research and extension five-year programming plan called Plan of Work (POW) and its implementation and funding support system. Researchers conduct a variety of innovative on-farm research projects working with local farmers on issues that are important to them. A couple of these research projects involve purple passion fruit and vanilla.

As a land-grant institution, the USDA is expecting the School of Agriculture to focus its work on supporting local farm initiatives and community-oriented agriculture and food organizations and activities.

4. Challenges and opportunities related to land access, water resources, and funding for agricultural education and research.

One of the challenges facing the School of Agriculture is funding, especially the annual research and extension UVI local match to support the USDA federal funding as required by the U.S. Congress. The UVI local match for federal funding is approximately \$2 million annually. As a new school, other challenges are office space and facilities to meet the needs of the new academic/instructional programs. The current facilities are mainly designed for research and extension not for academic programs instruction.

The creation of the new School of Agriculture by merging the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) and the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and adding the new Academic Program department has created an opportunity to bring the researchers and scientists together in addressing important agricultural and food production issues in the Virgin Islands jointly.

5. Strategic opportunities to expand UVI's agricultural impact and better support the territory's food security goals.

The most important strategic opportunities that will expand the impact of the UVI School of Agriculture in meeting the food security goals of the territory are:

- Continuing funding support for the new agriculture academic programs as well as local match for USDA federal capacity grants funding for research and extension work at UVI School of Agriculture. The local match is required by the U.S. Congress.
- Continuing funding support for the 2021 Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan in which the School of Agriculture is playing a key role in all eight mandate areas, especially education and training programs for local food farmers, entrepreneurs, and processors (Mandate VII). This is a comprehensive plan that addresses land and water issues in the Virgin Islands.
- Appropriate funds for the Annual V.I. Agricultural Caribbean Conference in Bill No. 33-0249 of 2020, that mandate the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Tourism to host the conference in St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. The School of Agriculture will be a key partner for this conference.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony on the State of Agriculture in the Virgin Islands.

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