

BILL NO. 36-0087

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

May 8, 2025

An act amending title 7 Virgin Islands Code by adding chapter 16 to require the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture to establish and manage a 30-acre orchard on St. Croix

PROPOSED BY: Senator Marise C. James

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. Title 7 Virgin Islands Code is amended by adding the following chapter 16:

“Chapter 16. Orchard Development

§ 311. Legislative findings

The Legislature of the Virgin Islands finds that:

(a) The Virgin Islands imports approximately 97% of its food supply; making the territory highly vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, high costs, and food insecurity;

(b) The 2021 Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan (“Plan”), developed pursuant to Act No. 8404, emphasizes the need to improve local food production and food sovereignty through sustainable and ecologically sound practices;

(c) Orchard development is specifically identified in the Plan as a High Priority Project necessary for long-term agricultural sustainability and economic diversification in the Virgin Islands;

1 (d) The establishment of local orchards supports climate resilience by promoting
2 perennial crops, soil conservation, and sustainable land use practices as outlined in the
3 Plan;

4 (e) The Plan highlights the importance of crop diversification, value-added
5 products, and agro-tourism, all of which can be directly supported by a strategically
6 developed orchard initiative;

7 (f) Orchard development contributes to job creation, supports small farm
8 businesses, and provides a pathway for generational farming; aligning with the Plan's
9 emphasis on education, training, and youth engagement in agriculture;

10 (g) Orchard development will provide educational, environmental, and economic
11 benefits by engaging youth and farming apprentices, improving tree cover, and offering
12 value-added crop opportunities for local processors and markets;

13 (h) The 2018 U.S. Virgin Islands Census of Agriculture showed significant
14 community interest in the production of local fruits such as mangoes, bananas, coconuts,
15 and breadfruit, reinforcing the need for an expanded orchard program;

16 (i) The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture Master Land Listing reveals,
17 as of FY2025, that the vast majority of available and leased agricultural land is
18 concentrated on St. Croix, with no comparable availability of surveyed government-
19 owned agricultural land on St. Thomas or St. John;

20 (j) Creating an orchard on St. Croix aligns with the Plan's objective to improve
21 agricultural productivity and reduce the territory's dependence on imported fruits, while
22 also enhancing access to fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food;

23 (k) Multiple parcels of Virgin Islands Corp land on St. Croix have already been
24 successfully leased for agricultural purposes including food crop and livestock

production; demonstrating existing infrastructure and administrative capacity to support a new orchard project;

(l) The agricultural zoning, historical land use patterns, and availability of 30-acre parcels on St. Croix, provide the most realistic and efficient opportunity to establish an orchard initiative without displacing current operations or requiring costly land acquisitions;

(m) The proposed orchard will cultivate a diverse array of culturally and nutritionally significant fruit trees—including tamarind, mango, guava, soursop, breadfruit, cashew apple, passion fruit, and more—thereby improving food security, promoting local heritage, and supporting biodiversity.

§ 312. Orchard

(a) The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (“VIDA”) shall establish and manage a 30-acre orchard on government-owned land under its jurisdiction on the island of St. Croix.

(b) The orchard shall include the cultivation of the following fruit trees:

- (1) Tamarind
- (2) Carambola
- (3) Star Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus acidus*)
- (4) Mango
- (5) Guava
- (6) Soursop
- (7) Mamey Sapote
- (8) Custard Apple
- (9) Cashew Apple
- (10) Cocoa

- 1 (11) Guinep
- 2 (12) JoJo
- 3 (13) Surinam Cherry (*Eugenia uniflora*)
- 4 (14) Golden Apple
- 5 (15) Fig
- 6 (16) June Plum (*Spondias* spp.)
- 7 (17) Rose Apple (*Syzygium jambos*)
- 8 (18) Lemon
- 9 (19) Lime
- 10 (20) Sweet Orange
- 11 (21) Sugar Apple
- 12 (22) Governors' Plum
- 13 (23) Pomegranate
- 14 (24) Passion Fruit
- 15 (25) Banana
- 16 (26) Coconut
- 17 (27) Breadfruit
- 18 (c) The VIDA may use federal and local agricultural development funds for the
- 19 planning, propagation, irrigation infrastructure, fencing, staffing, and maintenance of the
- 20 orchard.
- 21 (d) The VIDA may partner with the University of the Virgin Islands, non-profit
- 22 agricultural organizations, vocational programs, and youth development initiatives, to
- 23 promote training, education, and participation in orchard operations.

(e) The VIDA shall submit an annual report to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on the progress, expenditures, yield, and community impact of the orchard program.

(f) The VIDA may establish and collect reasonable harvest or use fees from individuals or entities seeking to collect fruit from the orchard for the purpose of resale, commercial processing, or value-added product development. All fees collected under this subsection shall be used exclusively for the maintenance, staffing, and enhancement of the orchard.

BILL SUMMARY

This bill amends title 7 Virgin Islands Code by adding chapter 16 requiring the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture to establish and manage a 30-acre orchard on government-owned land on St. Croix.

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