



TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &
AGRICULTURE

35TH LEGISLATURE
OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

FRITS LAWAEZ LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE ROOM
ST. CROIX

FEBRUARY 8, 2023

Good Morning, 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 on behalf of the University.

The Agriculture Plan Task Force has not been meeting since the submission of the Agriculture Plan and various meetings related thereto. Our legal charge and mandate have been fulfilled and has since expired. Therefore, I cannot speak on behalf of the Task Force at this time. I am here to speak in my role as a prospective member of the Agriculture Advisory Committee which the Plan and Act 8404 called into existence.

I am very grateful for the support the Legislature has provided in first passing Act 8404 to create the Agriculture Plan and then funding critical aspects of the Plan through Act 8700. Now that Act 8700 is enacted, I pledge to convene the first meeting of the new Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee that the Plan mandates. By enactment, the President of the University is a member of the Advisory Committee, but it will be up to the group to decide on its chairperson and other key positions. It will be vitally important for the Governor to appoint the representatives from the farming community so that their input and participation are present from the start of this process.

Since Act 8700 provides funding to the University for certain aspects of the Plan, I will make sure that those projects and programs are initiated. For example, discussions have already begun with the Dean of the School of Business, Dr. Kendra Harris, about the integration of the Agriculture Business Center into our existing Small Business Development Center. Our Director of Sponsored Programs, Mindy Solivan, stands ready to create a robust and professional grant writing and grant submission team so that the Territory is able to pursue Federal funds that will support various aspects of the Plan, but especially the water and irrigation needs. There is funding provided to the University to ensure that the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee functions and fulfill its oversight mission for the Plan. I will ensure that these funds are available to the Advisory Committee as they are appropriately requested. Likewise, the University will receive funding to ensure that the Local Food Fund is established by the Advisory Committee, which will ensure that private citizens can support Agriculture projects and initiatives through charitable contributions. The collection of annual agriculture data is critical to monitoring and evaluating the success of the Plan, and Act 8700 provides funding so the University, working in conjunction with the Advisory Committee, can create a comprehensive data collection and analysis system.

I still believe that the Agriculture Plan created a new pathway for the increase of agriculture productivity in the Virgin Islands. The University looks forward to working with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Education, the Economic Development Authority and other agencies mentioned in the Plan to create a vibrant future for agriculture in the months and years to come.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and to play a role in this very important initiative. I stand ready to answer your questions.