

## V.I. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE WEST INDIAN COMPANY LIMITED SHARES FY 2019 PROJECTED BUDGET

Date : August 21, 2018

ST. THOMAS- Members of the Committee on Finance chaired by Sen. Kurt Vialet, held a meeting at the Capitol Building on Monday, to receive testimony from the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDOA), and the West Indian Company Limited on the FY 2019 budget appropriations.

VIDOA General Fund request is \$4,013,625. The budget is a 12% reduction in comparison to the FY 2017 appropriation of \$4,587,000. VIDOA is mandated to receive \$500,000 due to Act No. 6836, the Agriculture Sustainable Act. The combination of the General Fund and the required monies totals the FY 2019 budget request for the General Fund to \$4,513,625. The budget breakdown is as follows: Personnel services and fringe benefits represent 85.5% and operating expenses is 14.4%. Additionally, VIDOA will also receive \$1,000,000 from the Tourism Agriculture Revolving Fund. The Department anticipates Federal Funds totaling \$339,262.

“Considering that there is a 12% reduction in the FY 2019 budget, how will it affect VIDOA?” asked Sen. Tregenza Roach. Carlos Robles, Commissioner of VIDOA, stated that Federal Funds allows the allocation to groups of farmers. Sen. Vialet also inquired, “Did VIDOA receive contributions from the Casino Fund?” Delreese Brown, Director of Administration and Management at VIDOA stated that VIDOA received funds in the third quarter of FY 2018.

Post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria, VIDOA is collaborating with FEMA, VITEMA and Witt O’Brien to develop Project Worksheets to repair or replace the infrastructure, buildings, and equipment damaged because of the storms. Currently, the Department has eleven vacancies that are critical

for operation. Despite challenges, VIDOA managed to meet with VINGN and the Department of Human Services to begin discussion on making wireless internet access for farmers markets throughout the Territory.

Sen. Roach inquired, "When can local farmers access SNAP Farmers Market Technology Program?" In response, Commissioner Roble said, "Internet access will allow the Dept. of Human Services and VIDOA to engage with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service for the installation of EBT card reading devices at each of the farmer's markets." VINGN has assessed the Bordeaux Farmer's Market and is developing an implementation plan.

Separately, Clifford Graham, President, and Chief Executive Officer stated that for FY 2019 the Miscellaneous Income projected at \$141,368. "However, no itemization was submitted to verify the dollar amount." FY 2019 budget is \$4,375,074. The budget is an increase in comparison to the \$3,281,854 appropriated for FY 2017. Personnel, fringe and Capital Outlays are \$1,575,000 for FY 2019. WICO'S Expenditures and projections are \$13,978,640 for FY 2019. Some of their goals are to complete recovery work on the property, complete the FY 2018 Audit, and to finalize the acquisition of the Havensight Mall from GERS.

Senators present are Kurt Vialet, Marvin Blyden, Janelle Sarauw, Novelle Francis, Dwayne DeGraff, Tregenza Roach, Brian Smith, and Nereida Rivera O'Reilly.

Photos: <http://www.legvi.org/committeemeetings/Media>

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