

ACT NO. 8700

BILL NO. 35-0003

THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Regular Session

2023

An Act appropriating funds for the adoption of various portions of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, submitted by the Agricultural Plan Task Force on December 29, 2021, as the official Agricultural Plan for the Territory

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WHEREAS, the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, submitted by the Agricultural Plan Task Force on December 29, 2021, can be amended by the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee and all amendments shall be submitted to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands for consideration and approval;

WHEREAS, should the Legislature not act within 120 days upon receipt of the amendments to the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan, the amendments to the plan shall be considered adopted;

WHEREAS, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands can make any changes to the plan through the legislative process. Now, Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. Title 7 Virgin Islands Code, sections 301 — 309 are repealed and reenacted in title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 33, section 474 as follows:

(a) The Agriculture Business Center is hereby established within the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The Agriculture Business Center shall provide resources for a broad spectrum of farmers, ranging from small farm businesses to larger or commercial farmers. The Center shall bring together the resources for assisting farmers with both the actual practices and skills that will facilitate improved farm productivity, as well as resources for assisting farmers with the “business” of farming, including, but not limited to, bookkeeping, technical skills, grant writing, other training needs and certifications, and assistance with the establishment of farming cooperatives.

(b) There is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, the sum of \$250, 000 from General Fund pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, to carry out the purposes of subsection (a) of this section.

SECTION 2. The sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the University of the Virgin Islands Office of Sponsored Programs for obtaining major federal grants to address water, irrigation, or infrastructure and other agriculture needs for the Virgin Islands. The Legislature of the Virgin Islands shall fund the University of the Virgin Islands Office of Sponsored Programs annually.

SECTION 3. The sum of \$120,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the University of the Virgin Islands for a grant writer for the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee.

SECTION 4. The sum of \$13,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the University of the Virgin Islands for the establishment of the Local Food and Farm Fund for farmers to be distributed pursuant to the recommendations and guidelines established by the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee. From time to time, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands will appropriate monies for the Local Food and Farm Fund.

SECTION 5. The sum of \$350,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture to hire critical positions to include the Local Food and Farm Coordinator pursuant to Mandate #1 and Mandate #3 of the Agriculture Plan. One Hundred and Eighty (180) days after enactment, the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture shall submit to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands a breakdown of the positions created to include titles and salaries. The Local Food and Farm Coordinator shall be an employee of the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture but report directly to the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee.

SECTION 6. The sum of \$500,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to establish a Public-Private Investment Fund and a Farmer's Grant Matching Fund in coordination with the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee.

Public-Private Investment Fund — To fund major initiatives from farmers which have the potential to significantly increase production including, but not limited to, hydroponics, aquaponics, technology enhancements, agritourism, or other investments that enhance the farming industry.

Farmer's Grant Matching Fund – To fund the match required for farmers applying for grants from the federal government or other non-governmental entities.

SECTION 7. The sum of \$500,000.00 is appropriated from the Education Initiative Fund, in the fiscal ending September 30, 2023, to the V.I. Department of Education to develop a curriculum and training program to secure a sustainable local food production system, to include pre-kindergarten through high school as outlined in Mandate #7 of the Agricultural Plan and to develop a pilot program. The Virgin Islands Department of Education shall work with the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee to develop the programs.

SECTION 8. The sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the University of the Virgin Islands for the operations of the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee to include the operations of the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee Operations, the Food Symbol Development and Marketing, Data Collection and Analysis, and to create a short-term and long-term plan to address critical water and infrastructure needs in conjunction with the V.I. Department of Agriculture.

SECTION 9. Act No. 8646 (Bill No. 34-0334), section 1 is amended by striking "\$1,176,670.49" and inserting "\$1,564,971.49" and by inserting "and the class action legal fees associated herewith" after "increase".

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on January 23, 2023.

Witness our Hands and Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 25th Day of January, A.D., 2023.



Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
President

Carla J. Joseph
Secretary



Bill No. 35-0003 is hereby approved.

Witness my hand and the Seal of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, This 2nd day of February, 2023 A.D.

Albert Bryan Jr.
Governor