

BILL NO. 35-0003**Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands****January 23, 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

PROPOSED BY: Senators Donna A. Frett-Gregory, Javan E. James, Sr.
Samuel Carrión, Alma Francis Heyliger, Dwayne M. DeGraff
Angel L. Bolques, Jr., Milton E. Potter, Novelle E. Francis, Jr.,
Marvin A. Blyden, Carla J. Joseph, Diane T. Capehart,
Ray Fonseca, and Franklin D. Johnson

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

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

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

10 ***Be it Enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

11 **SECTION 1.** Title 7 Virgin Islands Code, sections 301 —309 are repealed and reenacted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

13 (a) The Agriculture Business Center is hereby established within the Small Business
14 Development Center (SBDC). The Agriculture Business Center shall provide resources for a

1 broad spectrum of farmers, ranging from small farm businesses to larger or commercial
2 farmers. The Center shall bring together the resources for assisting farmers with both the actual
3 practices and skills that will facilitate improved farm productivity, as well as resources for
4 assisting farmers with the “business” of farming including but not limited to bookkeeping,
5 technical skills, grant writing, other training needs and certifications, and assistance with the
6 establishment of farming cooperatives.

7 (b) There is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, the sum of
8 \$250, 000 from General Fund pursuant to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC
9 ITEM OMB Implementation of Agriculture Plan, to carry out the purposes of subsection (a) of
10 this section.

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

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

22 **SECTION 4.** The sum of \$13,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund, pursuant
23 to Act No. 8617 (Bill No. 34-0302), AGENCY/MISC ITEM OMB Implementation of
24 Agriculture Plan, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, to the University of the Virgin
25 Islands for the establishment of the Local Food and Farm Fund for farmers to be distributed
26 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-k 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”.

BILL SUMMARY

This bill appropriates the funds necessary for the adoption of various portions of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.

Section 1 establishes the Agriculture Business Center within the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Section 2 appropriates \$250,000 to the University of the Virgin Islands’ Office of Sponsored Programs for obtaining major federal grants to address water, irrigation, infrastructure and other agriculture needs for the Virgin Islands.

Section 3 appropriates \$120,000 to the University of the Virgin Islands for a Grant Writer for the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee.

Section 4 appropriates \$13,000.00 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.

1 Section 5 appropriates \$350,000 to the Department of Agriculture to hire critical
2 positions to include the Local Food and Farm Coordinator pursuant to mandates 1 and 3 of the
3 Agriculture Plan.

4 Section 6 appropriates \$500,000 to the Economic Development Authority to establish a
5 Public Private Investment Fund and a Farmer's Grant Matching Fund in coordination with the
6 Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee.

7 Section 7 appropriates \$500,000 to the Department of Education to develop a curriculum
8 and training program to secure a sustainable local food production system, to include pre-k
9 through high school as outlined in mandate 7 of the Agricultural Plan and to develop a pilot
10 program.

11 Section 8 appropriates \$250,000 to the University of the Virgin Islands for the operations
12 of the Local Food and Farm Advisory Committee to include the operations of the Local Food
13 and Farm Advisory Committee Operations, the Food Symbol Development and Marketing,
14 Data Collection and Analysis, and to create a short-term and long-term plan to address critical
15 water and infrastructure needs in conjunction with the V.I. Department of Agriculture.

16 Section 9 appropriates fund to cover legal fees associated with the class action suit filed
17 by specific employees of the University of the Virgin Islands.

18 **BR23-0002/January 9, 2023**