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Greetings honorable members of the Senate, my fellow farmers and fishers, and all the people who love the Virgin Islands who like to eat good food:

It is an honor to be here today to share on behalf of the Virgin Islands Farmer's Alliance (VIFA) a farmer's perspective on the prevailing and emerging issues in Virgin Islands Agriculture. Despite the odds and thin profit margins stacked against us, there are still farmers and fishers right here in the Virgin Islands who stir before the sun to make sure that fresh, delicious, clean, and locally grown food is put here on the table.

As Wendell Berry famously wrote, "Eating is an agricultural act." You might have heard his quote before. Truly, all ah we are in this together. Everyone plays an important role. With every meal we consume, we make a decision -consciously or not- to support our own food security and sovereignty, or we decide to send our money -and ultimately our power- to far away places and unfamiliar faces.

As you know, at the heart of our food is the farmer and fisher. Despite a growing belief that they can or should be led away from the good earth and sea to be replaced by imports and gimmick food production technologies, we find truth again and again through time the simple wisdom of Proverbs 28:19. "One who works his land will have plenty of food, but one who follows empty pursuits will have plenty of poverty." So, this leaves us all with a decision to make -three times a day.

VIFA is dedicated to support the act of farmers working together to meet out territory's food security needs. This includes stocking farmers' markets as well as supermarkets, the Farm to School program, and collaborative farm production, aggregation, and collective marketing efforts like the weekly Ridge to Reef "farm share" subscription phone app. Importantly, we do this in a way that places our fellow food providers as central players in our local food economy. They deserve a chance to not only survive, but to thrive with respect and dignity while making a profit.



As important as respecting the farm and fisher, it is critical that agricultural policies and actions demonstrate unwavering respect to the land and sea. If not, our efforts cannot expand nor be sustained for future generations. Therefore, we help promote organic and regenerative growing practices through a USDA funded Transition to Organic Partnership Program. This program offers education, technical assistance, and mentoring for producers who want to increase clean yields while taking care of our precious natural resources. Through the work of the Local Farm and Food Council, the VI Department of Agriculture has pledged to soon offer organic production inputs like natural fertilizers and pest controls, funding to help pay for the costs of organic certification, and free workshops and webinars. We recently launched our first Organic 101 workshop with the incredible support of the VI Agricultural Business Center at UVI and had over 30 farmers attend.

VIFA is also engaged in research supported by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE). We have studied which are the best vegetable seeds to plant in the Virgin Islands, and are now studying the effectiveness of field mulching to lessen water requirements and to reduce weed pressure. We are also looking forward to partnering with Island Green Living in an exciting composting initiative to divert green waste into the mass production of organic compost for the use of Virgin Islanders territory wide.

Thank you for your time. I am available for any questions that you may have.

In humble gratitude,

Nate Olive

Nate Olive, Ph.D.

President

Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance, Inc.

Director

Ridge to Reef Farm