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Bill Would Direct Agriculture and UVI to Develop Program Preserving Seeds Against Climate Change, Natural Disasters

Climate / **Published On November 16, 2021 06:14 AM /**

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Days after the 2021 United Nations Climate Change otherwise called COP26 concluded, lawmakers in the Virgin Islands have approved legislation that would result in a community seed banking program to preserve seeds against climate change and natural disasters.

Sponsored by Senators Samuel Carrion and Marvin Blyden, the Act is requiring the Department of Agriculture and the University of the Virgin Islands to create a plan to develop a community seed banking program to store and preserve seeds for preservation against climate change, natural disasters and other situations that could lead to the total annihilation of crops, plants, and other fauna and flora.

The Act was among several bills deliberated during a Monday Senate hearing in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. Mr. Carrion told committee members that the bill is important because it is linked directly to achieving food security in the Virgin Islands.

“The passage of this bill will move us one step closer to achieving sustainable food security,” he said.

“Additionally, the initiative will provide strategy about how to promote research and other educational opportunities and engage various sectors of our community to work in collaboration,” Mr. Carrion added as he presented the bill for consideration.

“The fact is, due to our strategic Caribbean location we are prone to be impacted by various types of natural disasters at any given time to include effects of climate change. We must be proactive and prepared and preserve our culture and tradition,” the freshman senator continued.

Mr. Carrion said the seed bank would not be a "museum of seeds." Instead, the effort would resemble "a library where farmers and home gardeners can access seeds as needed while at the same time ensuring its preservation."

In his support for the seed bank legislation, Senator Novelle Francis said that creating such a bank is good sense. “It’s long overdue and certainly I believe that it is critical as we preserve genetic diversity for the future,” he said while pointing out that “all over the United States there are all kinds of preservation being done for various issues.”

“There is all kinds of preparations being done for the future so I think that makes great sense,” Mr. Francis said while Senator Franklin Johnson in his support used the example of the [custard apple tree](#).

Mr. Johnson said he knew of only one custard apple tree presently in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a stark contrast to his childhood days when the tree was ubiquitous, according to the senator. “This is an important piece of legislation because we have to make sure that we preserve these seeds and these fruits so our children and children’s children will be able to enjoy these fruits and produce,” he said.

The measure was approved in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary and will be forwarded to the full body for further consideration.