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St. George Village Botanical Garden and V.I. Trail Alliance Secure \$2.5M Each for Reforestation

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The St. George Village Botanical Garden on St. Croix.

The St. George Village Botanical Garden and the Virgin Islands Trail Alliance have received grants of \$2.5 million each from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program.

The money is part of nearly \$1 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act being spent by the Forest Service to increase tree cover across the United States, specifically in disadvantaged communities. The reforestation exercise comes following studies which indicate that communities with access to trees and green spaces are associated with a host of positive benefits, including improved health outcomes, reduced crime, and lower average temperatures, according to the USDA.

The Botanical Garden will use its grant to plant trees in the Garden – 1100 altogether – as well as on as-yet-unspecified school properties in the territory. According to a statement from the organization, the St. George Village Botanical Garden will serve as an “accessible, shaded, and safe public space for disadvantaged residents.” The 4-year grant will also allow the Garden to become an accredited arboretum – a planned collection of trees or woody plants of varying species.

According to the Garden, the grant will also facilitate becoming a “center for local multigenerational education and workforce development in urban forestry, community food resilience, and climate change mitigation.” Garden Executive Director Sarah Brady thanked the V.I. Department of Agriculture, specifically Assistant Commissioner Diana Collingwood, for the assistance provided in developing the grant proposal.

The Virgin Islands Trail Alliance Inc. plans to harness volunteer efforts to remove invasive species on St. Croix and replace them with native species and fruit trees, in an effort to “heal” the Big Island’s forests. “Healthier forests will provide tools for resilience to face daily and future environmental stresses,” according to the Trail Alliance.

The grantees from the territory were among 385 proposals selected from thousands of submissions across the United States.