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Virgin Islands Good Food Secures \$30,000 Grant to Boost Local Agriculture

Grant to aid development of farmer-led Territorial Agriculture Group (TAG)

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Virgin Islands Good Food has been awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Better Food Policy Fund through a collective action fund of the Tides Foundation. The grant, intended to support the Territorial Agriculture Group (TAG) project activities in 2024, is expected to be renewed for an additional \$30,000 in 2025.

Virgin Islands Good Food, alongside the Better Food Policy Fund, emphasizes the significance of civic collaboration to improve food policy. This funding will enable the continued development of TAG, a coalition of farmers, advocates, and agricultural professionals dedicated to advancing food policy and system improvements in the Virgin Islands, according to a release issued Thursday.

Predominantly farmer-led, TAG is committed to integrating accountability, equity, inclusive governance, and leadership into its initiatives to build thriving markets and equitable food access for all Virgin Islanders.

TAG, comprising over fifty farmers, represents a partnership across several farming organizations, all dedicated to building a resilient and inclusive food system in the USVI. Collaborating with partners like the Alaska Food Policy Council, TAG aims to drive meaningful change and foster a healthier, more sustainable community.

Since its inception, the Better Food Policy Fund has engaged over 300 food policy council stakeholders to co-develop its initiatives, ensuring alignment with the needs of these stakeholders, the release states.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Better Food Policy Fund to support our mission," said Sommer Sibilly-Brown, executive director of Virgin Islands Good Food. "This grant will empower us to make a meaningful difference in the Virgin Islands and further our commitment to agricultural growth."

Robbi Mixon, executive director of the Alaska Food Policy Council, added, "We are thrilled to deepen our relationship and knowledge sharing with Virgin Island Good Food. Despite being 5,000 miles apart, we have much more in common than not. Supporting each other through reciprocal learning and sharing is an incredible opportunity to support farmers and agricultural growth across the territories and non-contiguous US."

Representatives from Virgin Islands-based organizations serving farmers and agriculturalists also expressed their appreciation for the grant, which aims to build cohesiveness and alignment.

Benita Martin, co-chairperson of We Grow Food Inc.'s Future Development Committee in St. Thomas, stated, "I'm in TAG, representing We Grow Food, Inc. Now is the time we collectively work as one Virgin Islands to move our food system forward to feed the people of the Virgin Islands. Grassroots organizations have always been at the forefront of making positive changes in any community."

Yvette Browne, a member of TAG and co-owner of Sejah Farm in St. Croix, commented, "This partnership not only fuels our mission but also amplifies our dedication to fostering sustainable agricultural growth in the Virgin Islands. Together, we are poised to enact positive change and cultivate a future where food security and environmental stewardship thrive hand in hand."

Nate Olive, president of Virgin Islands Farmer Alliance and owner/operator of Ridge to Reef Farm on St. Croix, emphasized the value of TAG as a resource for farmers and others in the agricultural sector. "One thing I like about the group is that no one owns the group as it is everyone's fellowship group. We originally came together as TAG in response to a government-sponsored farming competitor licensed in Florida that was imported to VI with the support of VI elected officials to compete with our local agricultural industry. Today we continue to stand for fairness in our industry and demand the proper use of both federal and local taxpayer dollars to elevate locally owned farms as viable, competitive endeavors for the ultimate benefits provided to all Virgin Islanders."