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Quick Notes | VI Abattoirs on 120-day Suspension; Senate Approves Bill Mandating Agriculture Symposium in Territory

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Former Senator and current Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner, Positive Nelson, revealed during a Senate hearing in the Committee on Economic Development, Regulations and Agriculture Tuesday that the territory's abattoirs are currently under a 120-day suspension.

The suspension puts livestock farmers in the territory in a difficult position, as Mr. Nelson in the past [has spoken forcefully against](#) "bush kill", a term used for individuals who slaughter their livestock on their own. Mr. Nelson said the practice was illegal and could lead to food contamination, and called on those engaged in the practice — unless it's for personal use — to immediately cease.

But with no operational abattoirs territory-wide, the situation poses a dilemma. The abattoirs have been suspended since February 14.

Asked by Senator Alicia Barnes why the abattoirs were suspended, Mr. Nelson said the abattoirs received 17 non-regulatory citations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and that D.O.A. has been working to address the challenges, which he said was very difficult while maintaining operations. The former senator also said the department lacked a quality control director.

Even so, Mr. Nelson expressed confidence that the department would rectify the citations in the 120-day timeframe.

Elsewhere, lawmakers voted favorably for Bill No. 33-0249 - An Act amending Virgin Islands Code by mandating the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Tourism to host an agricultural symposium known as the "V.I Agricultural Caribbean Symposium", alternately and annually on the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John.

"I am proud of my colleagues and co-sponsor Sen. Javan James for making this bill a reality," said Senator Allison DeGazon, a co-sponsor of the measure. The bill was sponsored by Senator Javan James. "We are now going to take agriculture to another level which is to host a conference where people from all over the world can learn about agriculture in the Territory. The goal is to turn this into an agri-business conference and showcase local cuisine and produce," she added.

Mr. Nelson said the Dept. of Agriculture supports the measure, which he said is crucial to building physical knowledge and technical expertise among farmers.

"Having a conference in the US Virgin Islands, such as the proposed V.I Agricultural Caribbean Symposium, that focuses on the agriculture of the territory would provide an additional opportunity for our scientists, staff and students to present their research results that are very relevant to local production practices and commodities. Faculty and staff in the Cooperative Extension Service would also be able to participate and present information on the outreach programs they offer to the community," said Dr. Robert W. Godfrey, associate director of Agricultural Experiment Station & Professor, Animal Science at UVI.

"The Bill is timely and solidifies the historic roles that the Department of Tourism and the Department of Agriculture play, individually and collectively, and provides an additional forum through which to highlight the USVI agritourism product while empowering small farmers," said Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, whose testimony was read into the record by D.O.T. Communications Director Alani Henneman Todman.

Correction: February 26, 2020

A previous version of this story, because of information provided by the Legislature, said Sen. Allison DeGazon was the sponsor of the Caribbean Symposium bill. Ms. DeGazon co-sponsored the measure; Sen. Javan James is the chief sponsor.