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James-Sponsored Bill Creates Annual Agricultural Conference in Territory

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Lawmakers voted favorably on Tuesday 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 [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. James on Tuesday presented Amendment 33-661, which identifies the funding source for hosting the conference by allocating \$50,000 from the Department of Tourism's budget by October 1 of each year, Mr. James's office made known in a release.

Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Positive Nelson said the department 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.