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Lawmakers Back Leases for Sejah Farm and Rumina Construction, Boosting Local Economic Development

20-year lease for Sejah Farm aims to expand agricultural learning center and production; Rumina Construction's multi-year lease to support hurricane recovery and local employment

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From left to right: Senate President Novelle Francis, Yvette and Dale Brown of Sejah Farm. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

The promise of continued economic development prompted lawmakers on the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance to support two leases of government-owned lands to a pair of farmers and a construction company, respectively. Both bills were sent to the 35th Legislature for approval by Governor Albert Bryan.

Bill No. 35-0261 pertained to a lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Yvette and Dale Brown, doing business as Sejah Farm of the Virgin Islands. The property in question, Plot No. 9-P Estate VICORP Lands, Prince Quarter, Prince Quarter, St. Croix, is intended for use as a farm and other related purposes.

Presenting the bill to his colleagues, Senator Marvin Blyden explained that the twenty-year lease would allow Sejah Farm to “continue livestock and crop [production] on its 15-acre farm in Castle Burke.” The lease would allow the farm’s owners to continue the “important work” that they do, including the operation of an agriculture learning center, teaching animal husbandry, soil improvement, and value-added production.?

Annual rent will be \$225.69.

As with other government leases, Sejah Farm is expected to “utilize and improve the properties” before returning them to the GVI. As Mrs. Brown explained, a portion of the property is used for livestock grazing, another for organic crop production, and a third portion for restarting poultry, meat and egg production. They produce fresh meat and vegetables to meet both local and overseas demand. According to Ms. Brown, the farm’s operations “are exclusively focused on encouraging the territory’s agricultural industry.”?

The second lease, detailed in Bill 35-0255, was a multi-year agreement between the GVI, acting through the Department of Property and Procurement, and Rumina Construction, LLC to use lands at Submarine Base, No. 6 Southside Quarter, St. Thomas to operate an equipment and material storage depot yard, construction company office, and other related purposes. The measure was presented by Senator Blyden as well, who noted that the lease supports a local company that “provides a necessary service to the community.”

Rumina Construction is currently participating in several hurricane recovery projects and employs twelve Virgin Islanders. The company’s owner, Franklin Victor, explained that he has already begun improvements to the property since entering into the original lease. “We have invested almost \$100,000 in site preparations, improvements and upgrades,” he informed legislators.?

The bills will now be considered by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.