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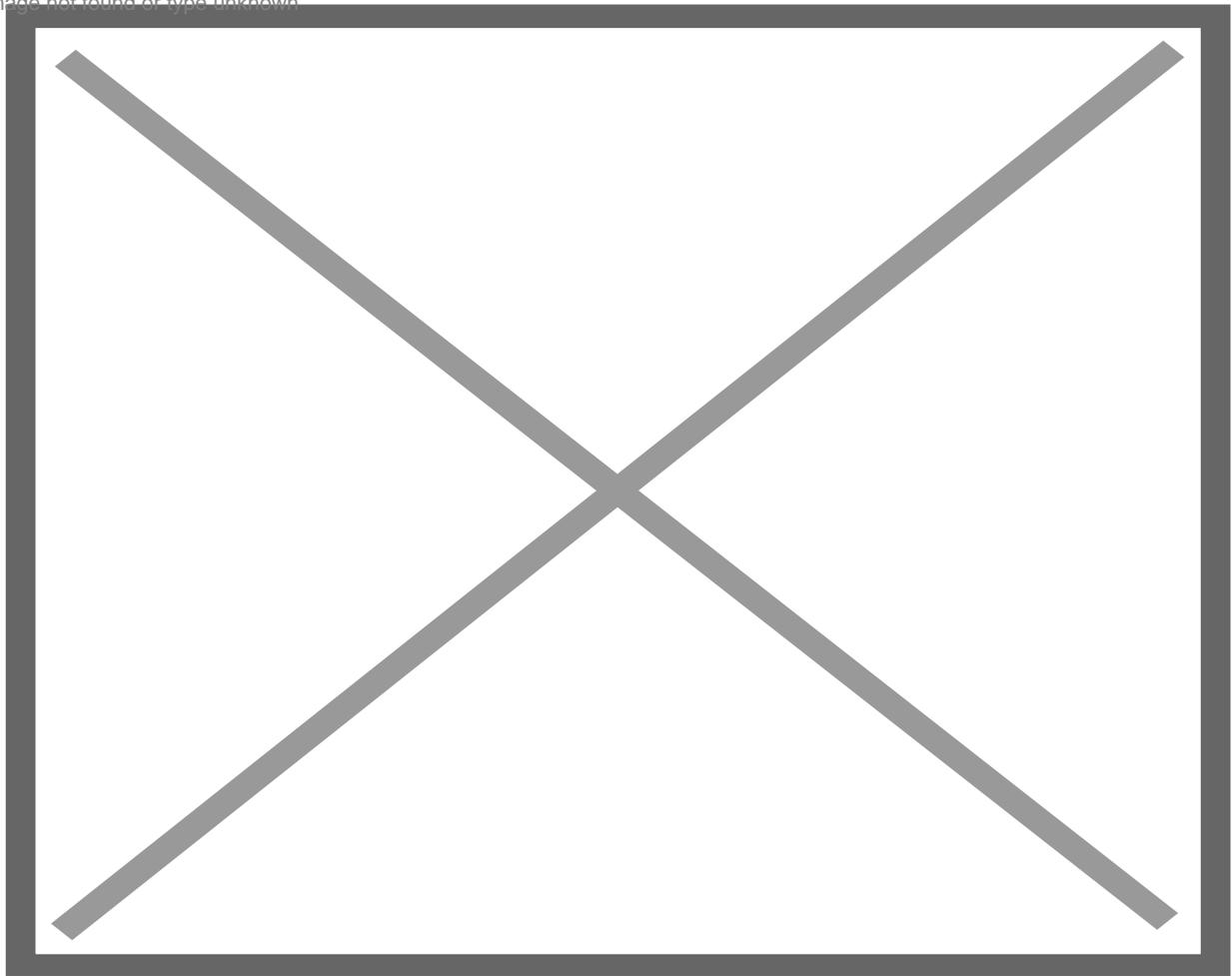
Agriculture & Food Fair Honors Farmers, Beekeepers, and Industry Leaders in 2025 Ceremony

From the dedication of the fairgrounds to Norman Edwards Jr. to recognizing top farmers like Peter Polius and O'Neill Allembert, the 53rd Agriculture & Food Fair honored those shaping agriculture in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Agriculture / **Published On February 17, 2025 09:39 AM /**

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Moko Jumbies perform during the 2025 Agriculture & Food Fair on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

The V.I. Department of Agriculture hosted the 53rd Agriculture & Food Fair Award Ceremony on Thursday evening, honoring individuals who have made lasting contributions to the territory's agricultural industry. The event, held at Government House, preceded the Agriculture

& Food Fair, which spans the long weekend at is held at the Rudolph Shulterbrandt Agricultural Complex.

This year, the fairgrounds were named in honor of Norman Edwards Jr., a former Department of Agriculture employee credited with modernizing financial and operational processes for the Ag-Fair Board during his 18-year tenure. “His accomplishments as treasurer included implementing daily enumeration, wristbands for entry, weekend passes, debit and credit card payment options, and on-site ATMs,” said Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen. Accepting the honor, Mr. Edwards remarked, “It feels good to be honored by your very own.”

In addition to the fairgrounds dedication, several pavilions and facilities were renamed to recognize industry pioneers. The Ag-Fair Farmers Market was posthumously named after Ruben Liburd, a dedicated farmer known for his generosity in providing produce to Methodist churches during Thanksgiving. “The impact of his work extends beyond the fair itself. It fostered a stronger and more resilient community,” officials noted.

The Livestock Pavilion was named for Henry Schuster, a former VIDA commissioner and lifelong advocate for agriculture. “When asked what his hobbies were, he would tell you there was only one: agriculture,” said Willard John, who presented the award. Schuster played a key role in the promotion of the St. Croix white-haired sheep, a unique breed developed specifically to meet the needs of local farmers.

The Food Pavilion now bears the names of Humberto O’Neal and Lilliana Belardo De O’Neal, described as a “dynamic duo” by Willard John. The O’Neals have been cultural staples in the Virgin Islands, vending at events for over four decades, including at the Agriculture & Food Fair.

The Livestock Farmer of the Year award was presented to Peter Polius, originally from Saint Lucia, who has been farming in St. Croix since 1990. Acknowledging the challenges of agriculture, Polius stated, “Farming is not an easy profession.” Despite difficulties such as unpredictable global markets and climate change, he remains dedicated to his work. “Coming right here on a Saturday morning and seeing people buying something that I took from a little seed and turned into food,” he shared, highlighting the deep connection between farmers and their communities.

Apart from farming, Polius has a passion for cricket and music, competing in local Calypso competitions. He believes that community support is essential for making farming sustainable, enjoyable, and profitable.

O’Neill Allembert was named 2025 Crop Farmer of the Year and used the occasion to encourage young people to enter the agricultural field, beginning in the school system. He urged local authorities to support those interested in farming, emphasizing its importance as an essential and noble profession. “You can make a difference,” he encouraged, calling on attendees to start small home gardens as a collective effort to advance agriculture in the territory.

The Beekeeper of the Year, Trevor Warner, relocated from Nevis to St. Thomas before settling in St. Croix, where he operates 150 active hives across eight locations, producing nearly 200 gallons of honey annually. Warner initially trained under Allembert before establishing his own honey business. In addition to his work in beekeeping, he is a musician, serving as bass player and lead singer for a local reggae group. As he accepted his award, Warner encouraged the public to choose honey over sugar and to help preserve bee populations by calling a beekeeper to safely relocate wild hives.

The Agriculture & Food Fair continues through the long weekend, concluding today at 6:00 p.m. In addition to a diverse range of vendors, the fair features children's activities, live entertainment from local artists, and numerous tents hosted by government agencies, federal partners such as CBP, and private enterprises.

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