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Over 400 Youths Introduced to Agriculture and Conservation Through St. Thomas Partnership

The V.I. Department of Agriculture, UVI's GRROE USVI Mangroves Program, and The Hideaway at Hull Bay have collaborated to educate students on sustainable farming, mangrove restoration, and ecological stewardship since 2022.

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ST. THOMAS — A public-private partnership involving the V.I. Department of Agriculture, the University of the Virgin Islands' GRROE USVI Mangroves Program, and The Hideaway at Hull Bay has introduced more than 400 local youths to hands-on education in agriculture and conservation since 2022.

According to a release issued this week, the initiative has given students in the U.S. Virgin Islands an opportunity to explore the intersections of sustainable farming, mangrove preservation, and hospitality. According to Dr. Louis Petersen, Commissioner of the V.I. Department of Agriculture, the program is playing a crucial role in shaping the future of agriculture in the territory.

“Young people are gaining invaluable knowledge about the possibilities of agriculture in the territory,” said Dr. Petersen. “The Hideaway at Hull Bay is an ideal example of how agriculture and hospitality can work together responsibly in sensitive ecological areas.”

Located in St. Thomas, The Hideaway at Hull Bay is a beachfront estate offering lodging, a regenerative farm, event spaces, and a beachside restaurant known as The Shack. Formerly Larry’s Hideaway, the property has operated since the 1970s and is known for its relaxed, undeveloped atmosphere and access to Hull Bay Beach.

Lee Steiner, the visionary behind the Hideaway’s educational outreach, said the mission is to make hospitality a platform for positive community impact. “Through our partnerships with local institutions and dedication to educational outreach, we aim to lead by example in how hospitality can work hand in hand with sustainable agriculture and conservation while safeguarding our islands for future generations of Virgin Islanders,” said Steiner. “To preserve something, it is essential to allow others to experience it and inspire the broader community to value and care for it too.”

The educational programming includes farm tours, hands-on demonstrations of sustainable agricultural practices, and restoration work in critical ecosystems like mangrove forests. Students participating in the programs also learn about the role these natural systems play in protecting coastlines, fostering biodiversity, and sustaining local food systems.

“Partnering with The Hideaway at Hull Bay has meant that hundreds of VI youth have learned about the importance of conserving mangroves and had hands-on experience restoring these ecosystems,” said Dr. Kristin Grimes, Research Associate Professor at UVI and Lead for GRROE USVI Mangroves. “It has been a great example of a public-private partnership.”

Steiner said the work being done at The Hideaway is about more than preserving the past—it’s about creating a sustainable, community-driven future. “A cornerstone of our mission has always been to create an educational environment that helps inspire the next generation of agriculture, conservation and hospitality leaders in the territory,” he said. “By sharing our passions with students, we hope to nurture a greater appreciation for the importance of protecting and working sustainably with our natural resources while creating more opportunities for young Virgin Islanders.”

Tours and educational programming are available for schools, community groups, and individual visitors. The initiative is also helping to shape an alternative vision for coastal development, one that prioritizes local heritage, ecological health, and economic sustainability over high-density construction.

For more information or to schedule a group tour, contact The Hideaway at Hull Bay at (340) 642-8400 or via email at reservations@hideawayhullbay.com. Additional details are also available at www.hideawayhullbay.com.