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Spirit of Craft Festival Comes to St. Croix, Centering Rum, Equity, and Local Innovation

On May 10, nearly 20 Black-owned distilleries from the U.S. and Caribbean will gather at Prosperity Farm for a day of tastings, workshops, and bold conversations about local ownership, agricultural sustainability, and transforming the rum economy.

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Nearly 20 trailblazing Black-owned spirits brands from across the Caribbean and mainland U.S. will descend on St. Croix this month for the first installment of The Spirit of Craft – Celebration of Craft Distilleries, a unique cultural and entrepreneurial gathering aimed at transforming the Virgin Islands' relationship to rum, agriculture, and ownership.

Set for May 10 from 9am to 9pm at Prosperity Farm on Mahogany Road, the festival invites community members to explore the deeper story behind spirits—one that intertwines distillation with sustainability, equity, and economic innovation. The event blends interactive learning with entertainment, spotlighting conversations on local ownership, agricultural value chains, and community-centered business models.

At the heart of this year's Spirit of Craft gathering is a push to reimagine the future of the Virgin Islands' distilling industry. With rum cover-over taxes contributing nearly 30% to the territory's economy, organizers say it's time to shift the conversation toward how those revenues are used, and how much of the distilling value chain could remain local.

The event centers around six guiding goals:

- Empower aspiring distillers with practical, accessible tools and education.
- Model business ownership structures that promote equity through social entrepreneurship and employee ownership.
- Support local agriculture by creating new markets for herbs, fruits, and botanicals.
- Maximize the benefit of rum cover-over revenues through increased reinvestment and transparency.
- Launch new career pathways through a UVI Craft Distilling Certificate Program, including apprenticeships and funding opportunities.
- Foster resilience and food security by linking sustainable farming to economic development.

One standout participant, Lincoln Nicholson of Jamaica's Wait A Bit Vodka, exemplifies this ethos. As the founder of the nation's first Black-owned distillery, Nicholson sources yellow yam trimmings—normally discarded as waste—from farmers in Jamaica's Trelawny region and transforms them into premium vodka. His approach both reduces waste and generates new revenue streams for local growers.

That model stands in stark contrast to how distilling currently works in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The territory's two largest producers—Diageo, maker of Captain Morgan, and Beam Suntory, which produces Cruzan Rum—import their molasses from Honduras, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. By 2035, the Virgin Islands will have spent an estimated \$1 billion on imported molasses to keep those operations running.

This year's event will unfold in and around the newly restored Prosperity Farm Distillery Farmhouse, formerly known as the Plantation Nightclub. Guests will find a mix of hands-on workshops, tastings from visiting distillers, a curated marketplace of local vendors, and live cultural performances. Demonstrations will include moonshine and mango brandy production. For families, the event includes tractor pull rides and a petting zoo courtesy of Jungle James.

The entertainment lineup features quadrille dancers, Rising Stars Steel Band, Baz N' Dem, Los Maestros, and the Craft Cocktail Mixology Competition. The evening will close with a concert under the stars from 6:00–9:00 p.m., headlined by jazz legend Dion Parson & The 21st Century Band, with The Troublemakers from St. Croix opening the show.

Admission to the festival is one canned food item per person, which will be donated to My Brother's Table, a local food security initiative. Adults 18 and older can purchase a \$20 wristband onsite for access to all tasting and cocktail stations. Proceeds from wristband sales will directly support the launch of UVI's Craft Distilling Certificate and Apprenticeship Program, giving Virgin Islanders the tools to pursue careers in this evolving industry.

For more information about the event, visit www.spiritofcraftvi.com.

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