

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory's First Farm-To-School Contest Set For May 28

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) will host the territory's first farm-to-school conference titled "Linking the V.I. Chain" on Thursday, May 28 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the University of the Virgin Islands Great Hall on St. Croix, according to a press release the department issued on Wednesday.

Farm-to-school programs enrich the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food-purchasing and education practices at schools and preschools. Their implementation may involve the purchasing, promoting and serving of local foods in cafeterias or as a snack/taste test; educational activities for students related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition; and offering students hands-on

learning through growing school gardens.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Sharon McCollum and Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Robles are among conference speakers. Workshop topics will include how to incorporate farm-to-school best practices in the classroom, working with local produce in the cafeteria, procurement procedures and more.

VIDE was awarded a \$21,698 conference grant in September 2014 through the United States Department of Agriculture's Child Nutrition Program, according to Angela Frett, VIDE's state director of special nutrition programs.

"It's a competitive grant and you have to apply showing what you plan to do and how you're going to build the program," she explained.

Frett praised the efforts of local farm-to-school advocate, Sommer Sibilly-Brown, founder and executive director of the Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition.

"Sommer approached me about three years ago regarding farm-to-school, and wanting to push it in our curriculum and community," Frett said. "Without us having the necessary personnel to dedicate the time to farm-to-school, Ms. Sibilly-Brown has been instrumental in doing this voluntarily. She secured a grant writer and has really taken the lead on this."

Conference organizers invite educators, school kitchen personnel, school garden specialists, farmers, producers, policy makers, and community advocates to attend.

The event is FREE and open to the public, but registration is required and space is limited. To register and for more information, call (340) 774-0100 Ext. 2812 or go [here](#). Registration deadline is May 22, 2015.

Feature Image: Students gather around as meat is processed in abattoir at the Rudolph Shulterbrandt Agriculture Complex on St. Croix during Agriculture Week 2015