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U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Approves USVI Hemp Plan; Bryan Keeps Pressure on Senators to Legalize Marijuana

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved the Virgin Islands Hemp Plan, which outlines the procedures and requirements for cultivating and producing hemp products in the territory, Government House announced Tuesday.

The plan, which is administered by the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture and Industrial Hemp Commission, includes provisions for maintaining information on the land where hemp is produced, testing the level of delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), disposing of plants that do not meet the necessary licensing and other requirements and ensuring compliance with all USDA and other federal guidelines, Government House said.

"This is very welcomed news for the territory," Governor Albert Bryan said Monday. "Not only will this approval lead to the potential for an increase in our local export manufacturing, but it will also help us further diversify our economy and add new streams of revenue."

Mr. Bryan also reiterated his call for Senate action on his administration's proposed expansion of the Medicinal Cannabis Patient Care Act, which aims to establish a taxed regulated system for the cultivation, manufacture, distribution of marijuana for medical, non-certified, recreational and sacramental use.

The revenues generated from the tax will go toward to the territory's Government Employees Retirement System, Mr. Bryan has said.

"I now call on the 33rd Legislature to act on the amended Cannabis legislation submitted by my administration in December and resubmitted two weeks ago to continue our forward push to establish new revenue streams to move us closer to shoring up the Government Employees Retirement System," the governor said.

Hemp is a term used to classify varieties of cannabis that contain 0.3% or less of THC, which is the psychoactive element in the plant. Hemp is considered a non-intoxicating part of cannabis that is harvested for the industrial use of its derived products and is one of the most durable natural fibers in the world.

Hemp is known to have more than 50,000 different uses, including textiles; clothing; foods; lotions, soaps, and cosmetics; pet bedding; mulch; paper products, such as newsprint, packaging, and cardboard; industrial products, such as oils, paints, and solvents; building materials; and technical textiles, such as netting, canvas, and carpeting.

By focusing on the different uses of hemp, the Virgin Islands hemp program intends to build its manufacturing sector and begin producing multiple crucial products that will be made in the Virgin Islands but be available for export and use around the world, Government House said.

The administration described the Virgin Islands Hemp Plan as a "comprehensive set of rules and regulations governing growing, inspections testing, and post-harvest activities; duties and responsibilities of extractors; labeling requirements for manufacturers; the use of USVI-approved certified seed; enforcement; and reporting and record-keeping requirements for growers and extractors."

The Virgin Islands Hemp Plan also contains provisions governing the University of the Virgin Islands' research and testing of hemp and hemp products.