

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Arthur A. Richards Junior High Dedicates Poultry Farm

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ST. CROIX -- At a brief ceremony held at the Arthur A. Richards Junior School on Wednesday, University of the Virgin Islands, Department of Agriculture and Department of Education officials lauded the dedication of the school's first poultry farm, made possible through the institution's Future Farmers of America program.

But while the officials conveyed their pleasure, it was Velda Hendricks, the school's agriculture teacher, who demonstrated the most passion and excitement about the program, which she started in April 2014 with ten students. This year 23 students enrolled, and Mrs. Hendricks said her goal to see her entire class of 80 agriculture students become members.

F.F.A. is an intercurricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership. It is one of three components of agricultural education, according to the program's official website. Mrs. Hendricks said she became interested in the program while attending a hunger boot camp in Indianapolis, Indiana last April. The agriculture teacher said she applied for and secured a \$5,000 grant on behalf of the territory, which was used to donate over 10,000 meals throughout the districts.

"I did that because I had my eyes set on acquiring a chapter grant for my school. So once the state (U.S. Virgin Islands) was in good standing, the chapter (Arthur A. Richards) -- was able to secure a grant of \$2,500." Mrs. Hendricks said her passion for teaching dates back to her days as an educator in St. Kitts, where she was born, and the dedication only grew when she moved to the territory. She said the \$2,500 was not enough to cover food drives were held to raise extra money.



Velda Hendricks, agriculture teacher and

advisor for F.F.A. at Arthur A. Richards Junior High School.

As for her teaching style, Mrs. Hendricks said she utilizes a hands-on approach. "I teach my students life, how to survive and sustain, and I make sure that the classes are very practical and realistic, so that when they go out into the world of work, they would be able to solve whatever problems they may face," she said.

Following the brief ceremony, students and officials gathered inside the small poultry farm to have a look at dozens of chickens that suddenly seemed frightened by the overwhelming number staring humans. Student participants then entered the farm to pose for pictures, and F.F.A. member Kenaieya Henderson held a chicken in her hands.

Yet, even with the program's success at the junior high level, Mrs. Hendricks said the major roadblock is the lack on continuation, as the F.F.A. program is not continued at the high school level.

"Whenever the students leave the junior high level, they go to high schools and they have agriculture, but the program is not being taught there," she said.

Feature Image: F.F.A. member Kenaieya Henderson holds up a chicken as spectators look on (Ernice Gilbert, VIC).

[Watch the original video](#)