

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Is Back And On The Move, Bryan Declares At Agrifest 2019

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Albert Bryan said that the U.S. Virgin Islands was on the move again following the devastating hurricanes of 2017, which forced Agricultural Fair organizers to put on a makeshift event during the [late days of May 2018](#). "If nothing else, the colors, the people, the smell of food, the beauty of the Agricultural Fair, is firm reassurance that the Virgin Islands is back and definitely on the move," the territory's leader said in remarks during the opening ceremony.

Local dignitaries, among them Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, Senate President Kenneth Gittens and other members of the 33rd Legislature, along with University of the Virgin Islands President David Hall, joined Mr. Bryan on a stage in a tent erected on the

west side of the fair grounds at the Rudolph Shulterbrandt Agricultural Complex in Estate Lower Love. The theme of the three-day event is "VI Agriculture: Still Growing in 2019".

The fair is known to be the largest of its kind in the Caribbean, and sees participants from around the region descending on St. Croix. During the three days of activities, thousands patronize a range of vendors for a wide variety of goods.



Governor Bryan listens to an elder woman at the 2019 Agriculture Fair on St. Croix
(Credit: Cruselda Roberts, VIC)

The local leaders, among them Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Nominee Positive Nelson, spoke of the importance of agriculture for the sustenance of life; the U.S. Virgin Islands still imports 99 percent of its food, and Mr. Bryan said more needed to be done to encourage a rekindling of sorts among residents, which he implied begins at a young age.

Using his daughters as examples, Mr. Bryan spoke about the disconnect between the younger generation and agriculture: He said his daughters, during their younger years, believed that the chickens in grocery stores were different from those seen around the islands. And he recalled asking one of his daughters whether she could climb a tree, only to elicit the response, "Why would I want to climb a tree?"

"They have lost the connection between agriculture and themselves," Mr. Bryan said. "We did a lot of things that we didn't understand, but the process of clearing the land, tilling the soil, planting a seed, watering it -- even when you don't see anything there and having that seed grow -- is actually a part of life and it's a lesson of patience. It's a lesson that in order to see something, you may not see the immediate fruits or any inclination that there's anything there. But not because you're not seeing anything, doesn't mean that your hard work will be in vain."



Speaking in the context of agriculture in the USVI, Mr. Bryan said the work to rebuild will take some time. "A year and a half, two years ago we were clearing the grounds, literally, making way for new growth," he said. The governor's talk sought to encourage Virgin Islanders that though the territory was not where it once stood following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, that does not mean a lot of work isn't being done. "You see, there's a new energy in St. Croix, can you feel it? There's a very new energy in St. Croix and I'm not going to take credit for it. I think that these hurricanes have proven to us that there are a lot of things around this island that are very special."

A universal theme yesterday amongst those who spoke was the importance of agriculture for sustenance. Ms. Plaskett did not divert from that messaging. "Agriculture is at the heart of our daily life, vital to the economy and society, and farming cannot exist without farmers because our farmers produce here in the Virgin Islands high quality, safe food for people here and abroad," she said.

Ms. Plaskett, who is a member of the House Committee on Agriculture, said she will be the fifth ranking member this year, and thereby will be the chairwoman of the Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research subcommittee. "It's the largest subcommittee on the Committee on Agriculture where I will have jurisdiction over policy, statutes and markets related to horticulture, including fruits, vegetables, nuts and ornaments," the delegate to Congress said. "So as an explanation, that is everything that is grown except what is considered the large crops. So not soy, wheat, corn and livestock."

Mr. Gittens spoke also spoke of the devastation the 2017 storms caused to agriculture, and he thanked God for helping the islands get to where they are currently, along with the hard work of stakeholders, including leaders and farmers.

This year's Livestock Farmer of the Year award went to former Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Henry P. Schuster of Echo Valley Farm, which Mr. Schuster said sits on 64 acres of family land.

This year's Crop Farmer of the Year award went to Charles Burton.

The fair continues today and ends on Monday.