

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Partnership With Coca-Cola, St. Croix Foundation Launches 'Farm-Tiendas' Small Agri-Business Development Initiative

Community Center / **Published On April 02, 2019 11:50 PM /**

Staff **April 02, 2019**



St. Croix Foundation on Tuesday announced the launch of its pilot Farm-Tienda Project, which will officially kickoff on on Friday at 3:00 p.m. at the Ann Abramson Pier in Frederiksted.

Coinciding with the kick-off event of the foundation's 2019 Food and Wine Experience, the Farm-Tiendas Project represents a dynamic partnership between the foundation, local farmers and Coca Cola Company, according to the release. The Farm-Tiendas Project supports the agricultural sector in St. Croix by granting eligible farmers a durable

and movable “farm stand” for the expansion of their local business. Tienda means a store or shop.

In December of 2017, just three months after Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the USVI, St. Croix Foundation was awarded a \$100,000 grant from Coca-Cola to replicate a pilot initiative in Puerto Rico entitled “Pop-Tienda”, which Coca-Cola sponsored.

Seeking to address some of the critical challenges facing small businesses in the affected areas, Coca-Cola’s pilot is providing container ‘stores’ to Puerto Rican mom-and-pop small business owners who lost their businesses in the storm, the foundation said.

Today, through a partnership between the foundation and Coca-Cola, the initiative is expanding to the island of St. Croix to assist local farmers rebuild from the 2017 storms through the foundation’s Small Agri-Business Recovery and Revitalization pilot initiative. The initiative will award eco-friendly container stores/community hubs to farmers as a vehicle for bringing their businesses back online. The “farm stands” are made from steel containers that will also be outfitted with solar panels, Wi-Fi and potable water, to allow farmers to stabilize and expand their businesses while also providing community hubs in the aftermath of future storms, the release said.

According to the release, having assessed the community’s most pressing needs immediately following the storms, the foundation, working in concert with its nonprofit group of local civic organizations and Coca-Cola Company determined that one of the most vulnerable populations and, in turn, economic vulnerabilities in our community (in comparison to neighboring Puerto Rico) was and still is St. Croix farmers. With the critical nature of St. Croix’s agricultural industry relative to the territory’s food security and economic resiliency, the St. Croix Foundation, in concert with its Coca-Cola partners, proposed modifications to the Pop-Tienda project being rolled out in Puerto Rico and developed its current Container Farm Stand concept.

The farm stand that will be presented at the launch event is a prototype of what will be offered to local farmers. The foundation has worked closely with Coca-Cola and Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition to develop sound criteria for awarding the farm-tiendas. The project will be officially rolled out in May. Over the course of the year, the foundation will collect data in order to evaluate the community and economic impact of each farm stand on the Farmer’s business, the release said.

“This Initiative is a perfect representation of the Foundation’s commitment to holistic community development and sustainability,” said St. Croix Foundation President Deanna James. “Since the 2017 hurricanes, St. Croix Foundation has been acutely focused on a data-driven, community-based approach to rebuilding that will empower residents in under-served neighborhoods while nurturing economic stability and resilience. The foundation hopes the project will inspire more community stakeholders to identify and support similar innovations and sustainable rebuilding strategies that leverage existing community assets for long-term stability and prosperity.”

St. Croix Foundation extended its appreciation to the Coca-Cola Company and Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition for their financial support and partnership.

For more information about how to support this and other St. Croix Foundation initiatives, contact the Foundation directly at 340.773.9898.

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