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## Gittens Calls For Detailed Report From Dept. of Agriculture on Recent Alleged Theft and Break-Ins on St. Croix

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**AgriFest 2019. By. IRENE ALI FOR V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Senator Kenneth Gittens, chairman of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture has requested that Agriculture Commissioner Positive Nelson submit a complete and detailed report on the recent alleged theft and break-ins at the Department of Agriculture facility on St. Croix.

Mr. Nelson on Wednesday told the committee that the department remains vulnerable to the environment, thieves, rodents, and stray animals. The testimony focused on D.O.A.'s operations, capital projects, and initiatives, including updates on the upcoming AgriFest plans, the status of

the territory's abattoirs, and the security and overall service to the people of the territory.

"Although we have installed cameras, overnight and weekend security, and changed locks, we are plagued with break-ins," Mr. Nelson said. "The boarding fence on St. Croix is nothing but goat wire. People walk over, cut, and bend the fence as they cross the property as a shortcut to the Estate Grove area. We must change that immediately."

So far this there have been two recent break-ins and the stealing of a golf cart that was retrieved. A police report was filed. It was not revealed how much money was stolen in the recent break-ins, however in late January 2020, [\\$39,000 was stolen from the department](#) following a full day of vendor payments for the 2020 Agriculture and Food Fair.

"I am truly concerned about the break-ins ...I will kindly ask you to submit to the committee a detailed report outlining the facts and circumstances and the losses you would have had with these break-ins. Your detailed report can be accompanied by the police report so that we could see that a report was made, a report from your respective agency outlining the facts and circumstances and what you have now put in place to try to prevent this from reoccurring," Mr. Gittens said.

Sharing some ongoing challenges of the department, Mr. Nelson told the committee that fencing on other facilities should be repaired and enhanced, and he made a plea for the department to have its own on-staff security during regular working hours. "We lose some stock to rats and other animals. Without protective housing many of our heavy equipment are battered by the atmospheric conditions," he told committee members.

Mr. Nelson explained that the on-staff security would deal with people who come into the department and behave uncontrollably. "Sometimes we have hostility; individuals come in, they are cussing, they are fussing, and someone has to make a call. On St Croix they will call and say commissioner come, and I have to go and try and calm that person down," he said as he provided justification for the employment of on-staff security.

Elsewhere, D.O.A. is working in tandem with the Department of Property and Procurement to catalog all properties the department owns. The Master Land Lease List has been updated and is being analyzed by both agencies. "This extensive review of land parcels and plot allocations territory-wide is being conducted in advance of scheduling inspections to determine status and to legitimize all holdings," Mr. Nelson said.

Inspections are scheduled to begin during the summer and will conclude when all 202 plots of varying sizes are inspected.

Relative to AgriFest, which is set for May 28, 29 and 30, Mr. Nelson said plans are well underway. "We have been the number one on AgFest in the Caribbean, and we plan to continue this tradition," he said.