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Agrifest Returns to Mid-Feb. Date After Years of Pandemic Disruptions

Culture / **Published On February 19, 2023 09:16 AM /**

Staff Consortium **February 19, 2023**

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A collage of Agrifest 2023. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The food, the entertainment, the art, the amusement for children and all the activities that make the Agriculture and Food Fair on St. Croix unique, were back at the Rudolph Schulerbrandt Agriculture Complex in Lower Love on Saturday, as the annual event returned to its traditional mid-Feb. date after years of pandemic disruptions.

Titled "Agriculture: Growing Today for Tomorrow... You, Me, All Ah We", the three-day event is celebrating its 51st year.

Local dignitaries participated in an opening ceremony where award winners are announced and government officials talk about their efforts to bolster agriculture in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Governor Albert Bryan, as he has done at past Agrifest events, spoke about his administration's support for agriculture, including through funding. "We are doing some big things in agriculture," he said before stating that he had recently signed into law a measure that provides [\\$2.2 million in funding for the territory's agricultural plan](#). The governor said the bill "is probably the most revenue generating agricultural product. It is all about food and nature. God is the best recycler because nothing goes to waste in nature."

University of the Virgin Islands President Dr. David Hall said UVI has long been a partner through its School of Agriculture in organizing the annual Agriculture and Food Fair, and he thanked the 34th and 35th Legislatures and Governor Bryan for providing funding to facilitate the Agriculture Plan, as the university and the Dept. of Agriculture [were tasked with creating the plan](#).

"I want to thank the 34th and 35th Legislature and the governor for that support. Under that plan that has been funded, we will now be able to shortly create an agricultural business center so that farmers can receive the expertise and business that they need to prosper," he said. "There is a half million set aside for public/private partnerships so that that farmers can have investments so that they can grow, change, and expand in ways that can increase agricultural productivity."

Sen. Novelle Francis, president of the 35th Legislature, expressed his affinity to the fair and its benefits to the territory's people. "There is something for everyone such as local delicacies, plants, arts and craft and a wealth of educational information displayed at the fair," he said. He said it's also "an opportunity to meet some old friends and make new ones. I am looking forward to eating some good food and buying sweet treats to send to my family abroad."

Delegate to Congress spoke of her continued work in Congress to promote and expand agriculture in the USVI. "During the pandemic I was able to give back to farming on my own. I tried really hard to make sure both crops on St. Croix and D.C were taken care of. Reflecting on this year's theme, I assure you that I, along with my colleagues in Congress, and the Biden-Harris administration are taking every action to move agricultural products to market more expeditiously, expand new agricultural processes and strengthen our chain of supply resiliency. Agribusiness is needed in the Virgin Islands," she said.

This year, Thomas Vanterpool was winner of the coveted Livestock Farmer of the Year. During his acceptance speech, the farmer recounted his childhood experiences, which he said made him the man he is today. "As a child there were two things that I love to include, nice cars and animals. Living in Grove Place gave me a chance to pursue my love for animals and becoming a farmer. I started off raising pigs. I would like to thank those who supported me along the way," he said.

This year's Agrifest was named after culture bearer Willard John, who was honored for his years of dedicated service not only to the Board of Directors of the annual event, where he served for ten years, but also for his dedicated service in several capacities to the Virgin Islands. He was presented with a plaque by Governor Bryan during the fair's opening ceremony.

Lydia Hendricks, attendee at Agrifest, expressed her love for the annual event. "I flew over from St. Thomas and I am happy to be here," she said. "It is larger than the ones I have seen before. It has been fun and my favorite part was listening to Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Nights. I will be back tomorrow," she said.

Attendee Winona Hendricks has been attending the fair for over 40 years. "I enjoy attending annually. It is a beautiful experience where you get to meet your family, friends, and enjoy the music and food," she said. "I always visit the children's exhibit to see the future of agriculture. The children did an amazing job. I saw home gardening, paintings, welding, auto parts and so

much more. The potential is there for our young people."

The fair grounds wasn't as populated with attendees on Saturday as in past events, and this outcome can be attributed to a number of factors, including the event's return to its regular date after being held just 7 months ago. Virgin Islanders and those visiting usually plan ahead to attend the fair. We noticed a few booths that are usually utilized by vendors, empty. Even so, Sunday may see a larger turnout as more residents make time to attend.

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