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Positive Nelson Being Removed From Dept. of Agriculture, Given New Role to Help Shape Marijuana Blueprint in USVI

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Positive Nelson, during his tenure as a senator led what was termed an "expedition" to Washington State and Colorado in May 2015, where the senator and his delegation met with government officials, and leaders in the field of medical marijuana. By. FILE PHOTO

Former senator Positive Nelson who was appointed commissioner of the Dept. of Agriculture by Governor Albert Bryan is being removed from the position, the Consortium has learned. The publication was also told by well placed sources that Mr. Nelson will be given a new role in the government's efforts to establish a marijuana industry locally.

Governor Albert Bryan has confirmed the changes to the Consortium, however he did not elaborate. "He is moving to a new role," Governor Bryan said of Mr. Nelson. An exact date regarding when Mr. Nelson would be placed in the new role was not divulged.

The decision to replace Mr. Nelson at the Dept. of Agriculture follows incessant complaints from [farmers](#), community members and most recently [senators](#), who criticized his performance as commissioner of D.O.A. during a Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture hearing in February.

Asked about the developments, Mr. Nelson told the Consortium that the discussion about his removal from D.O.A. was a discussion for this reporter and Governor Bryan. "Mr. Gilbert that's a conversation for you and the governor," he said.

At the February hearing, lawmakers expressed concern about the ability of Mr. Nelson to effectively push the department towards improving the prospects for agricultural production in the territory. Collectively, committee members were unimpressed by his efforts in trying to secure funding from and create synergies with agencies that could bring the territory close to achieving food security and reducing its food import bill. They expressed that he was not being aggressive enough, such as when he testified about trying to get the Office of Management and Budget to release about \$2 million that had been made available to the Department of Agriculture since last year.

Dale Browne, co-founder of Sejah Farm — the well-known 15-acre operation located in Estate Castle Burke just north of the V.I. National Guard Armory — in June 2022 said that the V.I. Dept. of Agriculture has failed in its duty to be a facilitator in helping farmers succeed.

"Unfortunately the agency that is supposed to support, regulate and provide the service to farmers doesn't quite get it that they are responsible for that support system so that farmers could be efficient, effective businesses," Mr. Browne told the Consortium.

He said the department, located in Estate Lower Love was closed the week of June 10, 2022 and therefore essential services needed by farmers at the time were unavailable. The reason for the weeklong closure, according to Mr. Nelson, was "to allow for rest, retreat, and professional development. A well deserved break."

The abattoir, where animals are butchered to facilitate the sale of meat, had been closed since one week before the Agricultural and Food Fair last year and remained unavailable through June 21, according to Mr. Browne, information that was corroborated by Mr. Nelson.

"If a livestock farmer depends on having animals prepared for anybody, they can't have it," Mr. Browne said.

Also unavailable at the time to farmers from the Dept. of Agriculture was water, a critical commodity of any successful farming operation. Feed and seedlings during the June 2022 period were also unavailable, according to Mr. Browne, as he expressed frustration with the state of affairs and how badly it was affecting farmers.

"This is the lack of respect, the lack of living up to their responsibilities, they're being negligent. This is just ridiculous," Mr. Browne said.

He said there has been a re-occurrence of services being unavailable immediately before and after the annual fair activities, partly because the Agricultural and Food Fair Board utilizes the

employees of D.O.A. to help prepare for the three-day event, and when the fair is over, the board leaves all the work up to department employees.

Mr. Browne then took aim at Mr. Nelson, stating that "it is the executive's responsibility to make sure the department is in right order. The laws are clear that makes this an industry. The laws are clear that they should be promoting the industry. But you can't say you have an agricultural and food fair and you are part of that and after" and throughout the year you fail to meet your obligations to the farmers and the industry, Mr. Browne said.

Relative to his role in shaping marijuana policy in the USVI, Mr. Nelson appears to be [well suited](#). Before marijuana legalization was popular, the then-senator was the most vocal and visible advocate of the drug, having envisioned and taking action to materialize legislation for medicinal marijuana and another for its recreational use.