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Senate Moves to Give Effect to Territorial Agriculture Plan by Establishing Local Food and Farm Council

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A bill that would help develop the local food industry in the U.S. Virgin Islands if signed into law received the favor of all on the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, passing without debate on Wednesday.

Co-sponsored by Senators Donna Frett-Gregory and Javan James Sr., [Bill No. 35-0049](#), seeks to amend Title 7, Chapter 1 of the Virgin Islands Code, to establish a Local Food and Farm Council in accordance with mandate five of the Virgin Islands Agriculture Plan.

“We made a commitment that we’re going to put our money where our mouth is and we’ve already started doing that. This helps to begin the work in earnest,” said Senator Frett-Gregory.

On February 8th, the committee had heard testimony on the status of the implementation of the Territorial Agricultural Plan. Ms. Frett-Gregory said that on that day, “we learned that the council is not only needed but without it work of implementing the plan is stagnated. So, it is important that we advance the Agricultural plan forward.”

Ms. Frett-Gregory said the senators did their best to incorporate suggestions by the Agriculture Task Force into the new bill.

According to correspondence from Dr. David Hall, president of the University of the Virgin Islands, the Local Food and Farm Council is a “critical aspect” of the agriculture plan which will provide guidance, oversight, monitoring, community outreach, and assessment of the plan.

Senator Marise James said she hopes that the council will influence changes in behaviors and government actions that are necessary to address water shortages, and to ensure food security in the territory.

The council will be made up of 11 members who will each serve a three-year term. The bill includes a measure that will allow five community members to be appointed by the governor to the council.

“I think in having a three-year term, it involves a lot more people and it gives the younger generation a chance to keep on coming in and working with the older generation to take over this industry,” said Senator Dwayne Degraff.

Committee Chair Sen. Javan James said he most looks forward to seeing the execution of the part of the bill that speaks to collecting, evaluating and publishing data on the territory’s critical food system. “Without data we are on a rollercoaster ride with no idea of where we are actually heading,” he remarked.