

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Louis Petersen Nominated to Lead Department of Agriculture, Positive Nelson Appointed Marijuana Czar

Agriculture / **Published On April 11, 2023 03:51 PM /**

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Governor Albert Bryan's nominee for Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner, Louis Petersen. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Dr. Louis Petersen Jr. is Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s choice to lead the Department of Agriculture, following the re-assignment of Commissioner Positive Nelson. The Consortium [previously reported](#) on Mr. Nelson's removal at D.O.A. and placement elsewhere to help shape marijuana policy in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Governor Bryan made the announcement on this week's press briefing from Government House, which was shifted to Tuesday due to the Easter holidays. Mr. Petersen's

nomination was announced alongside the official presentation of the Governor's nominee for Attorney General, Ariel Smith, whose selection was announced [previously](#). During Tuesday's briefing, Mr. Bryan also announced the nomination of attorney Yvette Ross as a judge for the island of St. Croix.

"I have been a long-time admirer of Dr. Petersen," the governor said. "Back when we served as commissioners together, he did a phenomenal job at Agriculture – with no money!"

The governor praised Mr. Petersen's accomplishments during his previous stint at the helm of the Agriculture Department including the formation of a farmer's co-operative on St. Croix. "Getting those farmers together and being able to get that going was a tremendous effort," Mr. Bryan said, "even though in the end the people who were involved in it didn't do their part."

He also noted Mr. Peterson's efforts in leading the Virgin Fresh Apicultural Project. Established in 2008, the project sought to expand production and marketing of apicultural products for supply to the hospitality industry and the general local market.

Following his first stint as commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Mr. Peterson went on to join the University of the Virgin Islands, serving as the assistant director of the Department of Research & Public Service, and the District Supervisor for St. Thomas/St. John.

Mr. Petersen accepted his nomination as Agriculture commissioner with gratitude towards the governor and lieutenant governor for placing their confidence in him, saying that he was "humbled" by the opportunity to serve in this administration.

"There is no shortage of challenges that the Department of Agriculture faces today, we all know that – that's no secret," Mr. Petersen. However, he said that he was confident – in God, his family, the team at the department, and the wider community – that a collective effort would result in success for all stakeholders.

Governor Bryan disclosed that it was actually Mr. Peterson's son who had initially made the suggestion that his father would be a good choice to lead the department's efforts to strengthen the territory's agriculture industry at this time.

Positive Nelson, who Mr. Peterson will replace as Commissioner of Agriculture, will become the "Cannabis Czar" – the special advisor to the governor in regards to cannabis.

"The Office of Cannabis is a regulatory body...not a promotional one. There are a lot of things we have to get straight before we bring cannabis to the market, in the medicinal realm as well as in the recreational realm," Governor Bryan noted, mentioning training for industry workers, the establishment of laboratories to test products, and proper coordination with law enforcement, among other things.

"Lot of little fine points that have to work together," the governor continued, saying that he hopes to have legal cannabis sales commence by the last quarter of 2023.

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.

Regarding his role shaping marijuana policy, the former senator appears 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.