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UVI Assumes Stewardship of Island Fresh Aquaponics Facility, Expanding Agricultural Innovation on St. Croix

In a landmark moment for agriculture and education in the USVI, UVI formally took over the Island Fresh Aquaponics site from FreshMinistries on June 3, setting the stage for expanded research, student learning, and food security initiatives.

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UVI President Dr. Safiya George tours the aquaponics facility with USVI Governor Albert Bryan Jr. By UVI

ST. CROIX — In a milestone move aimed at bolstering food security and agricultural innovation in the Virgin Islands, the University of the Virgin Islands has formally assumed stewardship of the Island Fresh Aquaponics facility at the historic Bethlehem Sugar Factory site on St. Croix,

according to a release issued Monday. The transfer, from Jacksonville-based nonprofit FreshMinistries to UVI, was commemorated during a ceremony held on June 3.

UVI President Dr. Safiya George was joined by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and the Rev. Dr. Robert Vernon Lee, Executive Director of FreshMinistries, to mark the transition—one that speaks to UVI’s continued role as a land-grant institution devoted to advancing research, education, and sustainability across the Caribbean.

“The University of the Virgin Islands is honored to carry forward the transformative vision set in motion by FreshMinistries,” said George. “The Island Fresh Aquaponics facility represents not only a model of sustainability, but also a tremendous opportunity to expand hands-on education, workforce development, and entrepreneurship in agriculture.”

The Island Fresh initiative was launched in 2021 by FreshMinistries as a catalyst for food production, wellness, and economic opportunity on St. Croix. Now one of the largest aquaponics operations in the region, the site features three 6,000-square-foot greenhouses and three 3,000-square-foot greenhouses, purpose-built to support large-scale sustainable farming.

Governor Albert Bryan praised the effort as a forward-looking investment in community health and development. “We are deeply grateful to Dr. George for embracing this opportunity and ensuring that Island Fresh continues as a vital resource for education and innovation,” he said. “UVI is the perfect partner for this next chapter.”

With the acquisition, UVI will integrate the facility into its broader agricultural programming, augmenting its existing aquaponics infrastructure, which had been reconstructed following the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

“This transfer will strengthen UVI’s capacity to offer new programs and allow us to immediately enhance research, teaching, and outreach activities that benefit students and farmers alike,” noted Dr. Usman Adamu, Dean and Director of UVI’s School of Agriculture.

UVI envisions the site as more than just an agricultural facility—it aims to establish Island Fresh as a nexus for education and economic development, where students, entrepreneurs, and community members will collaborate to innovate and grow.

“We are extremely grateful for the partnership with FreshMinistries that has led us to this point,” Dr. George said. “We look forward to carrying on their mission and to continuing the collaboration with FreshMinistries, St. Croix Farmers in Action, the Virgin Islands government, and other partners to serve the Virgin Islands community. This facility stands as a symbol of what’s possible when institutions, government, and community partners work together toward a sustainable future.