

SEJAH FARMS OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Boer Goats/Boer Goat Crosses - Meat & Herd Improvement
9P Castle Burke, Frederiksted, P.O. Box 3443
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Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research Subcommittee
"Supply Chain Recovery and Resiliency: Small Producers and Local Agricultural Markets"
Testimony

Bio.

My name is Dale Browne, along with my wife Yvette Browne we are the owners of Sejah Farm of the Virgin Islands (established in 1998). Sejah Farm primary business is raising St. Croix white sheep, Boer Goat and Boer Goat crosses for meat and herd improvement and organic vegetable production.

Sejah Farm of the Virgin Islands is located at 9P Castle Burke, Frederiksted, on Casper Holstein Drive, on the island of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands – the largest of the three sister islands, which include St. Thomas and St. John, territories of the United States Virgin Islands. Sejah Farm is situated in what we call the 'farm belt' of the island. Its fifteen acres of farmland, consists of eleven acres that are used as grazing for sheep and goats; three acres that are used for vegetable crop production; and three-quarter acres used for poultry production. We raise St. Croix white sheep, Boer Goats and Boer Goats crosses for sale, local fresh meat, and vegetables for local and off-island demands. Diversifying our farm is a means of having more than one source of on farm income and providing the finest possible quality of local meats and produce available for our island community. We provide agricultural technical assistance, seminars, education, training, and consultation to farmers and the community.

It is our mission to produce the finest quality raised meats (lamb, goat, and chicken) and organic vegetables in the U.S. Virgin Islands to meet the local market demand. We expect to exceed our customers' expectations in quality, delivery, and cost through continuous improvement and customer interaction.

Testimony

It is my pleasure to be here to testify on the *"Supply Chain Recovery Resiliency: Small Producers and Local Agricultural Markets"*. My testimony will reflect the impact of natural disaster, Covid-19 and programs offered by USDA during this pandemic on our island's agriculture.

I am an advocate for the resurgence of Virgin Islands agriculture. Developing a local islands food system and ultimately food security is a challenge. However, it is one I am willing to take on if "we are going to be part of our islands agriculture resurgence".

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Diversifying the farm over the year has help us to mitigate the impact of covid-19 pandemic and this has provided an opportunity for us to bringing the awareness of local food in the territory.

COVID-19 pandemic has negatively taken a toll on the farm operation, where we had to operate in new ways, and it has also created an additional burden to our overhead cost. There has also been a sudden change in sale volume, where real-time decision-making, labor, productivity, and the threats of all is at more of a risk.

There was a lost in income to crop and livestock due to COVID-19. Crops did not get to market as before the pandemic. On farm programs were halted, less patrons and the closure of restaurants, chefs unable to have schedule group dining catering and supermarket not taking large quantities of produce all due to the pandemic. Livestock sale ceased due to the VI Department of Agriculture abattoirs extended closure due to maintenance and the pandemic. In addition, we ceased our livestock production and the herds of both sheep and goats (ewes and rams) were separated to avoid any breeding.

The following income generating programs were halted or lowered due to the pandemic from 2019 until present:

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

CSAs are arrangements-based on a contractual agreement between a farmer and a consumer. A CSA concept is that the consumer, often described as a "shareholder" or "member", usually purchases upfront a "share" or "membership" prior to the growing season. Members can rely on fresh, local produce throughout the season. As each crop comes in throughout the growing season, members receive their share, often once or twice a week. The size of the shares varies in quantity and variety. The produce is picked up by members at the farm.

Bush Cook/Chef Cook

"Bush Cook/Chef Cook" is a local food culinary event conducted on farm, where 20 or more restaurant, chefs, and cooks participates. The scope of the event is based on the creativity of the participating cooks and chefs. The participants would choose any unconventional method of cooking preferable to their liking (coal pot, three stone, hole in the ground or any bush style cooking).

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CIGNA Health and Wellness Expo

CIGNA Health and Wellness Expo. Is a health and wellness contractual agreement with the VI Personnel Department to provide bags of local food for 2000 employee with CIGNA Insurance on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.

Bridging the Gap” Summer Program

“Bridging the Gap” Summer Program is an agricultural summer camp for age 7 to 18, which exposes its participant to the world of an island agricultural industry within the Virgin Islands. This includes participants from the department of labor summer workforce development.

USDA Programs

- I. NRCS- EQIP - Environmental Quality incentive Program is a conservation program which assist farms to develop their farm infrastructure, it is a program for well, fencing, irrigation, and pasture improvement.
 - Since the 2017 Hurricanes Maria and Irma to the territory I have seen changes to how the program are administered. When contract was issued there were no specific or engineering provided. When a practice were completed and the request for reimbursement was required it was then told of the new changes or engineering requirement. If these requirements were given before starting, then correction would be accepted rather than having to do over after monies have been spent. Then later were told we will have get your own professional engineer at you expense.
 - An EQIP Contract has a 90% reimbursement for practices completed. Therefore, a farmer will have to complete the practice before reimbursement.
 - Contract practice cost are calculated based on cost from the mainland USA. These costs are not relevant to the territory and when the practice are completed the farmer would have spent beyond the cost of the practice and not received any reimbursement for what has been spent.
 - Exp. Contract # EQIP 2014 74F352150GH requires the floor construction of a composting facility of 20sq’ to be reimbursed for \$57.00 with a roof structure reimbursement of \$270.00 thats a total of \$327.00. The actual cost of the floor completed was \$138.00 and the frame and roof was \$400.00 that’s a total of \$538.00 difference of \$186.00 not reimbursable.

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2. FSA

- **Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP)**
- **Disaster Assistance for Livestock Forage Losses (drought and hurricanes)**

Dale K. K. Browne

Sejah Farm of the Virgin Islands