

PRESS RELEASE

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VI Youth Shines at OECS Agriculture Meeting in Costa Rica

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Two young Virgin Islands farmers recently participated in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Council of Ministers for Agriculture meeting held at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Costa Rica during May 26 to May 30.

Marley Donovan of Aukie's Farm and Basheera Maduro, a student and crop and livestock farmer participated in the meeting at a time when the Government of the Virgin Islands continues to support the Territory's youth in agriculture.

During the regional meeting, the farmers engaged in workshops, farm visits, and discussions focused on modern farming techniques, climate resilience, and market strategies.

Marley Donovan shared his experience, noting the value of exposure to regenerative agriculture practices and natural pest control methods. Additionally, Basheera Maduro emphasised the importance of technological advancements and strategic partnerships gained through the tour.

The farmers accompanied Honourable Dr. Karl Dawson who attended the meeting on behalf of the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley.

The meeting also addressed critical challenges faced by young farmers, including limited access to financing, land availability, infrastructure needs, and high operational costs. Participants proposed practical solutions such as mentorship programs, inclusion of agriculture in primary education, development of agro-processing facilities, and increased access to low-interest loans and grants.

Stakeholders agreed on several initiatives to strengthen the sector, including training programs, industry-specific development projects, and the establishment of the OECS Agriculture Forum for Youth—providing a platform for young leaders to share ideas and influence policy.

The Government of the Virgin Islands welcomes these regional efforts and remains committed to supporting the Territory's youth in agriculture and fostering an environment where they can thrive. The innovative spirit and resilience

demonstrated by young farmers are recognized as vital components in building a sustainable, resilient, and prosperous agricultural future for the Territory.