GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

Tel: (284)468-2730
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Remarks by Premier Wheatley at World Food Day Farmers Market and Food Fair

Release Date: 16 October, 2026



Remarks by

Hon. Natalio D. Wheatley

Premier and Minister of Finance

World Food Day - Farmers Market and Food Fair

" *Innovate Today. Nourish Tomorrow.*"

16 October, 2026

Good morning to each and everyone.

I am very pleased to join you today as we observe World Food Day and celebrate those who help to feed The Virgin Islands: our farmers, fisherfolk, food producers, entrepreneurs, students and everyone who continues to invest their time, resources and energy in strengthening our local food system.

World Food Day reminds us of our shared responsibility to confront hunger, improve nutrition, and build food systems capable of providing sufficient, diverse, safe and nutritious food for present and future generations. This year's theme, *“Innovate Today. Nourish Tomorrow,”* challenges us to think more deeply about how we produce, preserve, distribute and consume food. The Food and Agriculture Organization describes innovation as combining forward-thinking solutions with traditional knowledge and inclusive approaches to build a better food future.

For The Virgin Islands, that challenge could not be more relevant.

Over the past few years, conflicts and instability beyond our shores have affected fuel and energy costs, shipping and supply chains, and the availability and price of food and other essential goods. As a small island economy heavily dependent on imports, we feel these external shocks especially strongly.

The lesson is clear: food security is not simply about agriculture and fisheries. Food security is about national resilience. We cannot control what happens thousands of miles away, but we can strengthen our ability to feed ourselves here at home. We can become more resilient, more sustainable and, wherever possible, less

dependent on imported food and imported energy.

Innovation does not always have to mean highly sophisticated technology. It can mean improving irrigation, finding better ways to preserve food and extend its shelf life, using our limited land more productively, introducing our young people to modern agriculture, reducing waste, and connecting farmers and fisherfolk more effectively with consumers, supermarkets, hotels and restaurants. It also means combining new ideas with the knowledge and experience already possessed by generations of Virgin Islanders who have farmed our land and fished our waters.

My Government is committed to supporting our food producers through that transformation. We have allocated lands at Paraquita Bay for farming and agricultural production. We are also constructing the Farmers Reservoir at Paraquita Bay to provide farmers with a permanent water supply for crop irrigation. It is scheduled for completion next year. We have established the Agriculture and Fisheries Grant Policy, and the first tranche of grants is now in the final stages of the administrative process. We have also started the process for construction of a fish landing site at the Omar Hodge Fishermen's Wharf. These investments are about creating the conditions in which farming, fishing and food production can grow.

But Government cannot build food security by itself. That requires all of us.

If we genuinely want them to succeed, we must support our food producers with more than words. We must support them with our purchasing power.

When local produce is available, buy local first. When locally produced poultry, eggs and meats are available, buy local first. When our fisherfolk bring fresh fish and seafood to market, buy local first. And our hotels, restaurants and households must increasingly consider how menus can reflect what we grow, raise and harvest locally.

Buying local keeps more money circulating within our economy. It supports Virgin Islands families and businesses. It encourages greater production. And, importantly, it strengthens our ability to withstand the next international disruption.

So as we celebrate World Food Day, let us not see today's event simply as a market or a fair. Let us see it as part of a larger movement towards a Virgin Islands that produces more, wastes less, innovates boldly and takes greater responsibility for feeding itself.

If we innovate today, invest today, produce today and support local today, we will be better positioned to nourish our people tomorrow.

That is the resilient Virgin Islands we are working to build together.

In closing, I commend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for their continued efforts to promote greater awareness of food security and for bringing together our schools, farmers, fisherfolk, food producers, investors and consumers through activities like this Farmers Market and Food Fair.

Most importantly, I commend our farmers and fisherfolk themselves. They labour because they believe that these Virgin Islands can produce more of what we eat. Every crop planted, every harvest gathered and every catch brought ashore contributes to our collective resilience. Rest assured, you have the support of your Government and the Territory.

I thank you, and I wish everyone a productive and enjoyable Farmers Market and Food Fair.