

The Virgin Fresh Apicultural Project: Development and Expansion of the U.S. Virgin Islands Apiculture Industry

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- **Introduction**
- **USDA AMS Specialty Crop Block Grant funding**
- **Apiculture in the U.S. Virgin Islands prior to the project**
- **The Virgin Fresh Apicultural Project implementation**
- **The Virgin Fresh Apicultural Project results**

USDA AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

Specialty Crop Block Grant – Farm Bill 2008

- **Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide funding to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops**
- **Specialty crops are defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, nursery crops and floriculture**
- **U.S.V.I. and other Territories were not eligible for program at that time**

USDA AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

Specialty Crop Block Grant – Farm Bill 2008

- **Lobbied Congress to allow U.S.V.I. & other Territories access to funding**
- **2008: US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture received \$100,078 award to fund *The Virgin Fresh™ Apicultural Project: Development and Expansion of the U.S.V.I. Apiculture Industry***
 - **Enhance the competitiveness of U.S.V.I. apicultural specialty products**
 - **Honey, beeswax, propolis, bee pollen, bee colonies**
- **Project Partners: U.V.I. Cooperative Extension Service (CES), U.V.I. Small Business Development Center, and V.I. Department of Tourism**
- **Strategy: increased production + increased marketing = enhanced competitiveness**

VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: POTENTIAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

- **Approximately 15 beekeepers, 300 hives in the U.S.V.I. (2008)**
 - average yield of 60.8 lbs. honey per hive (NASS Honey, 2008)
 - average price of \$1.03/lb (NASS Honey, 2008)
 - ~ value of \$18,787.20 honey produced in the U.S.V.I.
- **Project aims to triple the number of hives in the U.S.V.I.**
 - Increase honey production & economic value from \$18K to \$54K (in NASS dollars) in 2 yr. period

VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: THE SCIENCE AND BUSINESS OF BEEKEEPING

- A 12 week course was designed covering subjects such as basic first aid, safety around the hive to writing a business plan and marketing your product
- The instructors were experienced bee keepers from the Virgin Islands along with staff from DOA, CES UVI-SBDC and the community
- Classes were held on each of the islands, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John

VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: THE SCIENCE AND BUSINESS OF BEEKEEPING

- Classroom and field instruction: Monday evenings
Sunday mornings (St. T) Saturdays (St. C & St. J)**
- Three - 12 week courses held per island between 2008 -
2009**



ADVANCED TRAINING IN APICULTURE

- **Beekeeping Training held during 2009 the Virgin Island Agriculture and Food Fair**
- **VIDA and CES sponsored the attendance of six trainers at the University of Florida Bee College in 2009**
- **VIDA and CES collaborated with the Wright Apiary to conduct a 2-day queen rearing workshop for beginning and experienced beekeepers in 2010**

VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: OUTDOOR TRAINING

- ▶ **Students learning how to build bee hives/boxes**



- ▶ **Students learning how to handle bees in hives**



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: HONEY!

- Honey being deposited by bees into honeycomb cells



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: PROJECT PROMOTION

- ▶ Honey being distributed to guests at St. Croix Agri-Fest 2010



- ▶ Beekeeper F. Jackman teaches about bees at St. Thomas Agri-Fest 2010



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: MARKETING HONEY

- ▶ Honey was the secret ingredient at the Ultimate Chef Competition, St. Thomas
- ▶ Honey was distributed to chefs at “A Taste of St. Croix” fine dining event



A TASTE OF ST. CROIX



ST. THOMAS CARNIVAL: ULTIMATE CHEF COMPETITION



ULTIMATE CHEF DISHES WITH LOCAL PRODUCE



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Beekeeping student Charles Barry (far right) sells his new “Bee Perfect” honey brand at the Abattoir Open House in St. Thomas



National Promotion of the Project

DINING



Virgin Islands Beekeeper Eldridge Thomas teaches local youths the art of honey harvesting.

What's the Buzz?

Carol M. Bareuther, RD

The latest excitement on the island agricultural scene is Virgin Fresh Honey, a project designed to develop the beekeeping industry in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"There's a market for locally produced honey," explains Carlos Robles, acting district supervisor for the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service who originated the project with Dr. Louis Petersen, VI, Commissioner of Agriculture. "...but the few longtime beekeepers can't keep up with demand and there hasn't been enough of a next generation: people willing to manage hives and produce honey as a business for profit."

Grant money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture has provided funding for training and so far, over 70 people have taken the classes that are held on Saturdays in 12-week sessions.

Daniel Stanley, director of marketing at the VI Department of Agriculture, is an avid student. "The first few classes deal with bee biology, myths, first aid and safety. In later classes we learn about equipment and how to build our own hives. Finally we suit-up in protective 'bee jackets' and learn how to extract honey." Instructors, including longtime beekeepers, University entomologists, and UVI Small Business Center consultants teach the art, science and business of beekeeping. In addition to honey, local beekeepers will market associated products such as beeswax and bee pollen. Virgin Islands honey is pure and contains no water, corn sweeteners or other additives.

Beekeeping got its start in the territory during the Danish era, when honey was harvested from hives found randomly in the wild. Today's beekeepers build bee boxes and actively manage their hives. "Our tropical climate is favorable for year-round production" says Robles. "Honey flow is highest in the traditional rainy season from May to June. However, rain can come and flowers will bloom at any time."

Eldridge Thomas, a longtime beekeeper on St. Thomas says "I've seen bees get nectar from the flowers of genip, coconut and avocado and take juice from mango and sugar apples. Weather affects the sugars and acidity in the honey much like grapes used to produce wine. Flavor nuances can change month to month and that's what makes it interesting"

Currently, Virgin Islands honey is available at farmer's markets, agricultural fairs and from individual beekeepers. But that is changing. "Our goal," says Robles, "is to increase sustainable honey production over the next three to five years. The VI Department of Tourism is helping to create a market by including samples in their promotional packages. When commercial production becomes practical the world should be ready for this rare tropical sweetener."

With the help of Virgin Fresh Honey local producers should stay busy as bees and ultimately provide enough honey to fill the sweet tooth of locals and visitors alike.

For more information, visit www.vifresh.com

Virgin Islands' honey is truly a taste of paradise.



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: INDUSTRY GROWTH

- ▶ The Department of Corrections carpentry shop begins production and sale of bee boxes/hives with inmates who participated in the beekeeping training



VIRGIN FRESH BEEKEEPING PROJECT: RESULTS TO DATE

- Over 100 beekeepers trained (# of hives TBD in 2010)
 - began with 15 beekeepers, 300 hives in the USVI (2008)
- Current price of honey = \$8.00 - \$15.00/lb depending on island/market
 - Economics of production study needed
- Secondary industries growing:
 - Box construction
 - Meads
 - Vinegars
 - Soaps
 - Lotions



VIRGIN FRESH BRANDING & MARKETING

- Branding locally produced agricultural products as “Virgin Fresh”
- Differentiates local from import
- Goal is to eventually introduce quality standards



THANK YOU!

