



## **Planet Green Force: “Seeds of Security” Program**

**“Seeds of Security”** is food security/sovereignty program that is conceived to be part of Planet Green Force (PGF), a new initiative for school-aged youth that connects children to global environmental issues through community-level, local engagement, igniting passion and inspiring the next generation of green ambassadors. Key aspects of all Planet Green Force programming are age-appropriate curriculum, hands-on activities that make a real difference towards solving sustainability issues including those related to environmental justice, and volunteerism/community service that allow students to earn badges, collaborate and have fun.

An agricultural-based program, “Seeds of Security” addresses the importance of increasing food security/sovereignty and reducing food waste. In the US Virgin Islands (USVI) for example, 97% of the food supply is imported, leaving the territory vulnerable to shortages, decreased freshness/nutritional value and increased costs. The level of importation also creates a substantial carbon footprint and causes pollution, such as increased incidence of marine debris resulting from single-use plastic waste. Increased local food production is not only cleaner and healthier, it also encourages and supports local farmers and local business owners.

“Seeds of Security” will provide an example of a circular, self-sustaining program, teaching waste reduction while cultivating food security, combating hunger and encouraging good nutrition/healthy eating. It will not only provide a valuable learning platform but also real-world food production, allowing kids to eat, share and sell what they grow.

Applying aspects of the US Department of Agriculture’s Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) programming, which incorporates authentic, agricultural-based content to teach core curriculum concepts in science, social studies, language arts and nutrition, “Seeds of Security” would involve:

- Offering field trips to local farms to see and experience authentic, traditional farming and understand its importance and place in society

- Providing each student with fabric grow bags, taking them through the steps of planting and caring for their “crop” with corresponding curriculum on the science behind it (prizes will be given for the best “crops” at each stage of gestation)
- Supplying each participating school with a hydroponics or aquaponics system
- Introducing aspects of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the important and growing role they play in sustainable farming
- Allowing students to track amount of water, daily growth, weight/volume of crops, etc.
- Collecting seeds from crops to start next generation of plantings
- Studying nutritional aspects of fresh produce and creating related posters/artwork
- Introducing composting and hands-on creation and maintenance of school composting pile, with corresponding age-appropriate curriculum on the science behind the composting process
- Working with cafeterias to create lunch menu items incorporating “Seeds of Security” produce (and measuring percentage of school lunch sustained through the program)
- Having PGF participants help prepare cafeteria menu items (if allowed) and/or have students create dishes using produce, with a contest for best tasting results
- Sharing recipes and creating a recipe book (consider selling recipe book with proceeds going back to the program)
- Creating student-run school marketplace days where excess crops are sold, with proceeds going back into the program
- Tracking metrics/percentages on where all crops were used (students will create final age-appropriate projects/presentations to fellow students/families at end of year school event)
- Creating an opportunity that is similar to UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s “Global Chef Challenge” (a Junior Global Chef Challenge)
- Tracking the volume of reduction of food purchased due to students’ own gardening efforts

Bill 35-0003, introduced by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory and others and signed into law by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in early February 2023 (ACT 8700), appropriates funds for the adoption of various portions of the territorial Agricultural Plan. The original plan was submitted by the Agricultural Plan Task Force, of which Island Green Living President Harith Wickrema was a member, on December 29, 2021. The appropriation bill includes funding support for agricultural Prek-12 education (Mandate #7 of the plan).

The proposed PGF “Seeds of Security” activities offer a direct relationship to this Agricultural Plan mandate. A pilot program envisioned in the USVI would have the VI Department of Education develop Prek-12 curriculum and programming – in conjunction with local nonprofit Island Green Living – to support food sovereignty, with the aim to expand throughout the USVI. Next, with data and measurable results, the goal would be to expand throughout the United States and globally, mirroring the success of this “born in the USVI” initiative.