



## THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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## **Students Engage in Environmental and Cultural Sustainability Exhibit at 32nd Annual Eco-Fair**

Approximately 450 students from across the St. Croix District participated in an engaging environmental and cultural exhibit at the 32nd Annual St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA) Eco-Fair, held on April 15, 2025, at the St. George Village Botanical Garden.

Presented by the Virgin Islands Department of Education's Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education (DVICE) and the Division of Sustainability, the interactive exhibit offered 3rd through 6th grade students a hands-on learning experience that blended environmental science with cultural traditions.

The exhibit was designed as a scaffolded journey, guiding students from soil testing and plant knowledge to the cultural significance of Virgin Islands foodways. At one end of the exhibit, Director of Sustainability Cydney Meadows and Program Manager Sumayah Bryan engaged students in real-time soil testing. Students explored the properties of healthy soil, the movement of nutrients, and the needs of various crops through tactile interaction and scientific analysis.

The next section showcased local bush plants such as *popo lo lo*, *white mary*, *tannia*, and *kallaloo bush*, sourced in partnership with sustainability advocate and farmer Dale Morton. Although not present, he collaborated with the DVICE State Director to ensure the exhibit reflected both cultural authenticity and environmental accuracy.

As students moved across the table, they delved deeper into meaning. Ms. Brown led conversations about how food holds history, tells stories, and how each ingredient in the kallaloo dish symbolizes resilience, creativity, and community. "This isn't just about what we eat," she told students. "It's about what we remember."

The final element of the exhibit featured a streaming video presentation by cultural steward and performer Jeannette Rouse Cochrane, who demonstrated how to prepare kallaloo while narrating the historical significance of food passed down through generations. Originally recorded by Ms. Brown during the COVID-19 pandemic with support from the Crucian Cultural Group, the video continues to serve as a valuable educational tool. It was made available to students at the Eco-Fair via QR code, along with take-home recipe cards and soil health guides.

▶ Watch the kallaloo cooking demonstration here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGtwxsX6HPA>

"This collaboration is exciting because it highlights the Virgin Islands' traditions, the science behind them, and how we can continue to preserve our history," said Meadows. "The preservation of our cultural foodways is a collective responsibility that thrives on strong partnerships. By working together across our department and with dedicated community stewards we create a living repository of knowledge to put into practice. This collaboration ensures that these traditions continue to nourish and enrich generations to come, strengthening our community bonds and deepening our understanding of who we are," said Stephanie Chalana Brown.

This year's Eco Fair was a demonstration of 21st-century, interdisciplinary learning in action. The exhibit illustrated how place-based education can be scaffolded to move students through environmental science, cultural studies, and community knowledge as one continuous experience. Grounded in both cultural relevance and academic standards, the shared table became a site where students could investigate the ecology of the land, explore the histories embedded in food, and understand how heritage and sustainability are deeply interwoven.

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