

# Summer Camp Closing Program celebrates Local Partnerships in Supporting Youth Agriculturalists

The [University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service](#) (UVICES) office, in collaboration with other local agencies, held the Agricultural Enrichment Summer Camp (AESC) [closing program](#) on Friday, August 7, 2015. Officially merging two types of agriculture related youth organizations ([Future Farmers of America](#) and [4-H](#)) for the first time in the territory, the camp took place at the [UVICES](#) office on the [University's St. Thomas campus](#) and was led by their staff as well as junior counselors from various high school [FFA](#) organizations.



*Agricultural Enrichment Summer Camp students and staff in the CES Demonstration Garden.*

The success of the program can be attributed through local partnerships with the [Departments of Labor \(DOL\)](#), [Human Services \(DHS\) Division of Disabilities, Vocational and Rehabilitation Services](#), and the [Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities \(VIUCEDD\)](#).

“From the perspective of our partners, they were hoping to connect these young adults, from their unit especially, with job opportunities,” said [Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr. Ph.D., UVICES](#) Assistant Director of Agriculture & Natural Resources. “The success in this case is that we were able to make a partnership, a connection, with the [Mahogany Run Golf Course](#) who indeed accepted to have one of our youngsters, after coming to the program, work with them.”

The parents and general community were able to see for themselves what the youth gained at the ceremony which showcased presentations by students that reflected their summer experiences. Youth worked directly with a diversity of agriculture professionals, including crop and livestock producers, landscapers, agricultural instructors, inspectors, enforcement officers and others during the program which began on June 29, 2015.

[Dr. Petersen](#) reflects on the experience and shared that the six-week summer program successfully increased knowledge and created awareness of career and work opportunities in the field of agricultural science both for the youth and their parents. The second objective was also successful in equipping the participants with job preparation skills through classroom presentations, practical exercises, and field activities.

In addition to the camper that gained employment at a position at the [Mahogany Run Golf Course](#), one of the junior counselors is also now employed at [St. Thomas Adventure Tours](#) with other potential job placements still in negotiation at other locations. As networking continues throughout the year, other students are expected to be connected to local businesses or organizations.

Felecia Blyden, the DHS, [Disabilities & Rehabilitation Services](#), Administrator, extended her appreciation and congratulations on the success of the collaborative project to UVI, CES, VIUCEDD and the DOL.

“My vision of the project was to create an environment where clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation program would be exposed to careers in agriculture in an integrated setting. What we created was beyond my expectations; a microcosm of the best that this community has to offer. The young people learned from each other and became very sensitive to the challenges that the individuals with disabilities encounter on a daily basis. The individuals with disabilities felt good to be included, and they gained valuable social and practical skills,” she shared. “We should think of these individuals as champions in the forefront, letting people know that it is alright to be a differently-abled individual. This is definitely a model that should be replicated more in our community!”

Fernando Webster, Territorial Program Coordinator at the VI Department of Labor, also shared his elation with the success of the project describing it as, “a stepping stone to greater things to come.”

“I’m really proud of just the fact that it was a strong collaboration. The fact that the CES from UVI partnered with the DHS Vocational Rehab Department and the DOL to bring this program together. I mean, right now under our new federal guidelines, which is the [Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act](#), we are mandated to have community partners such as Vocational Rehab Services so to have something bridge us and bring us together prior to even us... to have us even ‘like’ practicing the legislation enactment which is July 1<sup>st</sup> and we started this collaboration beforehand, it was great!”

UVI employees Ashley "Ashanti" George, Albion "Chico" George and Dr. Petersen as well as other [UVICES](#) staff lead the youth camp during the six weeks. Photos were captured of all activities, guest speakers and field trips and can be found on the [UVICES facebook page](#) and [ces.uvi.edu](http://ces.uvi.edu). Students all expressed their enjoyment of agriculture career topics exploration as well as irrigation and water usage activities and field trips.

Even the junior counselors, who were mentoring the students along with CES staff benefitted more than financially from their participation in the camp. “This experience 'kinda like' opened my eyes. It gave me an opportunity to really not only look into just agriculture itself, but myself,” said [Jonisha Aubain](#), camp Junior Counselor and [Charlotte Amalie High School FFA](#) organization Treasurer.

“We’ve had no 4-H program for two years, the public has been calling and we just responded to that need. So we like to pride ourselves, as we said, to responding to the changing needs,” said Dr. Petersen.

[UVICES](#) staff will stay connected to students throughout the year and will include them in other activities including the [31<sup>st</sup> Caribbean Agro-Economics Symposium](#) (CAES) happening on St. Croix the week of Monday, August 10. At the CAES conference, [FFA](#) and 4-H students will present collaboratively on what we have been doing regarding the aspects of production, promotion through social media, and the actual market site. They also will share their success in the indoor systems they have used as a model for the issue of climate change mitigation.

A partnership between the federal and local governments through [UVI](#), at [UVICES](#) they pride themselves on their National slogan, “Extended Knowledge; Changing Lives”. To contact [Dr. Petersen](#) and the staff at [UVICES](#), email [lpeters@uvi.edu](mailto:lpeters@uvi.edu), call 340-693-1080 or visit [ces.uvi.edu](http://ces.uvi.edu). Connect with them online via social media @uvices.



*Students and staff sharing their love for being taught Agriculture through song during the closing program.*