GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN OBSERVANCE OF CARIBBEAN NUTRITION MONTH

Release Date: 15 June, 2026



Fellow Virgin Islanders,

I am Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, Minister for Health and Social Development.

It is my privilege to address you as we observe Caribbean Nutrition Month alongside our regional partners and the Caribbean Association of Nutritionists and Dietitians, known as CANDi.

This year's theme, **"Healthy Eating, Active Living: Promoting Caribbean Food as Medicine,"** speaks directly to one of the most important issues affecting the health and well-being of our people.

Across The Virgin Islands, and throughout the Caribbean region, we continue to see an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, obesity, and certain types of cancer.

These illnesses affect not only individuals, but entire families and communities. They impact productivity, increase healthcare costs, and place significant pressure on our healthcare system.

The good news, however, is that many of these diseases can be prevented or better managed through healthier lifestyles, proper nutrition, and regular physical activity.

Today, I want to encourage every resident of The Virgin Islands to reflect on the choices we make each day regarding the foods we eat and the lifestyles we live.

Nutrition is one of the most powerful tools available to improve population health outcomes and reduce the burden of chronic disease. Healthy eating contributes to stronger immune systems, healthier children, improved mental well-being, increased energy, and longer, healthier lives.

Simply put, food can be medicine.

The Caribbean is blessed with a rich agricultural heritage and an abundance of nutritious local foods. Fresh fruits, vegetables, peas, beans, fish, ground provisions, herbs, and natural spices have nourished generations of our people.

These foods are not only culturally important, but they also provide essential nutrients that help protect against disease and support overall wellness.

As a Territory, we must continue to return to healthier eating habits and reduce our dependence on highly processed foods, that are often high in sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development therefore encourages all residents to become familiar with, and follow the recommendations outlined in The Virgin Islands EatWell Guide. The EatWell Guide promotes balanced nutrition and healthier lifestyles through practical daily habits, including:

- Eating more fruits and vegetables
- Choosing whole grains and fibre-rich foods
- Drinking more water and reducing sugary beverages
- Limiting foods high in salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats

- Monitoring portion sizes and
- Staying physically active every day

These are not difficult changes, but they can have life-changing benefits.

I encourage families to prepare more meals at home using local ingredients. I encourage parents to teach children healthy eating habits from an early age. I encourage schools, workplaces, churches, and community organisations to continue supporting wellness initiatives that make healthy choices easier and more accessible.

Our commitment to nutrition also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, and Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

By strengthening nutrition education, supporting local farmers and fisheries, improving food security, and promoting active living, The Virgin Islands can move steadily toward achieving these goals while building a healthier and more resilient society.

As we observe Caribbean Nutrition Month, I urge every resident to take small but meaningful steps toward healthier living.

Allow me to share a few practical tips that can make a difference:

- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables
- Choose local foods whenever possible
- Drink more water throughout the day
- Reduce sugary snacks and beverages
- Reduce alcohol consumption
- Reduce salt intake
- Read nutrition labels carefully
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes daily; and
- Encourage healthy habits within your household and community.

Together, these simple actions can improve our health, strengthen our communities, and reduce the long-term burden on our healthcare system.

I wish to thank the Caribbean Association of Nutritionists and Dietitians, our local nutrition professionals, healthcare workers, educators, farmers, and all community partners for their continued dedication to improving the health of our people.

Fellow Virgin Islanders, the health of our Territory depends on the decisions we make today. Let us embrace healthier eating, active living, and the wisdom of using Caribbean food as medicine.

Together, we can build a healthier future for ourselves, our children, and generations to come.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless these Virgin Islands.

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