



SOUTHEAST

TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

FROM RIDGE TO REEF: GROWING ORGANIC OPPORTUNITIES IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

When Dr. Nate Olive looks across the fields of Ridge to Reef Farm in St. Croix, he sees more than crops. He sees the future of organic agriculture in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

As the owner of one of the territory's certified organic farms, president of the Virgin Islands Farmers Alliance, and coordinator for the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) in the Virgin Islands, Nate wears many hats. Yet his mission remains simple: help more farmers overcome barriers and succeed with organic practices.

For Nate, that work begins with understanding the challenges farmers face every day. "As an organic farmer, I see and understand how difficult and challenging it is," he explains. From certification costs to access to organic inputs and technical support, many producers face obstacles that can make transitioning to organic systems seem out of reach.



Ridge to Reef Farm, located in the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Dr. Nate Olive at his certified organic farm in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Rather than accepting those barriers, Nate has focused on building solutions.

Working alongside farmers, government agencies, the University of the Virgin Islands, nonprofits, and community partners, he helped advance several new initiatives designed to support organic agriculture throughout the territory.

These efforts include a local organic cost-share program, increased access to organic inputs, support for vegetative buffer strips, and investments in organic market development. All were developed based on feedback from farmers about the challenges they face most often.



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What excites Nate most is the power of partnership. "The partnership part of TOPP is something that I see as the greatest asset in all of this," he says. "It's all the partnerships working toward the goal of organic certification and practices."

That spirit of collaboration extends to his own farm. Located on St. Croix, Ridge to Reef Farm produces a diverse mix of vegetables, tropical fruits, and value-added products. The farm serves the community through a CSA program, wholesale sales, agritourism experiences, and educational outreach. Its fields and orchards produce everything from lettuce and arugula to mangoes, jackfruit, coconuts, bananas, breadfruit, cashews, and moringa.

Diversity is by design. By growing a wide variety of crops and focusing on systems that work with the island's climate, Nate has built a farm that prioritizes resilience, long-term sustainability, and community connection. He believes organic agriculture creates opportunities not only for environmental stewardship but also for economic development through value-added products and access to emerging organic markets.



Organic plants and seedlings at the farm.



Participants learning about organic practices at an on farm workshop at Ridge to Reef Farm.

Among the many accomplishments of the TOPP program, Nate points to technical assistance as one of the most impactful.

By connecting farmers with mentors, resources, and one-on-one support, the program is helping more growers adopt organic practices and pursue certification. He believes those relationships are creating lasting change and expanding organic acreage throughout the territory.

As National Organic Harvest Month reminds us, healthy food systems are built by people willing to invest in their communities and help others succeed. Through his leadership, farming experience, and commitment to collaboration, Dr. Nate Olive is helping cultivate a future where more farmers can thrive and more communities can benefit from the power of organic agriculture.

"Without this program, there simply would not be people going organic here, it has made all the difference."
- Nate Olive



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