

FINTRAC, INC.

It's been said that, "Progress is impossible without change." (George Bernard Shaw).

Fintrac Inc., a global consultancy that implements agricultural projects in developing countries for the United States Agency for International Development and other clients, is phasing out its operations after 30 years, the last 17 as a VIEDC beneficiary with corporate offices in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The company has provided training and technical assistance to 2 million farmers in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia over this time with the goal of increasing crop productivity and smallholder incomes. The success of their donor-funded projects has improved the food security of 10 million people including children and provided a springboard for in-country agribusinesses to flourish. Transition can be bittersweet; but Fintrac's president, Claire Starkey, is envisioning a bright future.

Ms. Starkey reports that many Fintrac team members have already transitioned to other development consultancies, commercial corporations, government agencies, and academic institutions and that she and other principals are confident that the collective footprint of these former staffers will be transformational. In the USVI, numerous organizations have hired departing "Fintrackers" for their acumen in project and financial management, marketing, IT, HR, and communications.

Others have started new businesses of their own, and Fintrac will shortly launch a social media campaign to promote these enterprises, which to date include six agricultural consultancy companies (in the U.S., Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Honduras), and two business services companies. The latter includes a software development and IT support services firm that is being established in St. Thomas by one of Fintrac's directors (www.brackio.com).

"When the VIEDA Board - in our first hearing years ago - informed us that EDC beneficiaries were expected to benefit the USVI community, we told them that we wanted Fintrac to be an exemplary EDC beneficiary," Starkey says. "And we hope that has been the case - and that even as we wind down, we're able to do so with a degree of grace and professionalism in gratitude for the many opportunities that have been afforded us. Opening an office on St. Thomas in 2005, with related EDC designation, was pivotal in terms of expanding our management team and service capabilities. We were able to quickly recruit top-notch, on-island professionals as well as stateside talent, improve our online presence, and focus on product innovation in our core business area," added Starkey.

Fintrac is optimistic moving forward that a new generation of small agricultural businesses will sustainably build, innovate, and improve on many of their foundational tenants, and is further supporting that goal by open-sourcing free-of-charge a large cache of its technical training products, which until recently were proprietary (see https://fintracu.fintrac.com).

Of course, every good business knows the tremendous value of partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. And Ms. Starkey reflects on the impact that these have had not just within various communities abroad, but also in the USVI community.

The company's local philanthropic activities supported education, families, and the arts through non-profit organizations, including the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, My Brother's Workshop, the Forum, United Jazz Foundation, and the Family Resource Center – and Fintrac also partnered on local agricultural initiatives with the VI Department of Agriculture, the University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) Extension Service, We Grow Food, and Congressional Representative Stacy Plaskett's office, amongst others.

Collaborative activities within the territory included the delivery of training workshops and in-field transfer of good agricultural practices, showcasing school gardens at the St. Thomas/St. John Agricultural Fair; and contributing to the expansion of the Bordeaux Farmers' Market and laboratory facilities at the new UVI School of Agriculture.

"There are real opportunities for Virgin Islands youth to learn and intern within the agricultural sector these days, and we hope that they do because, as Fintrac staff and partners can attest to, there are interesting and rewarding career options out there!" said Ms. Starkey.

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