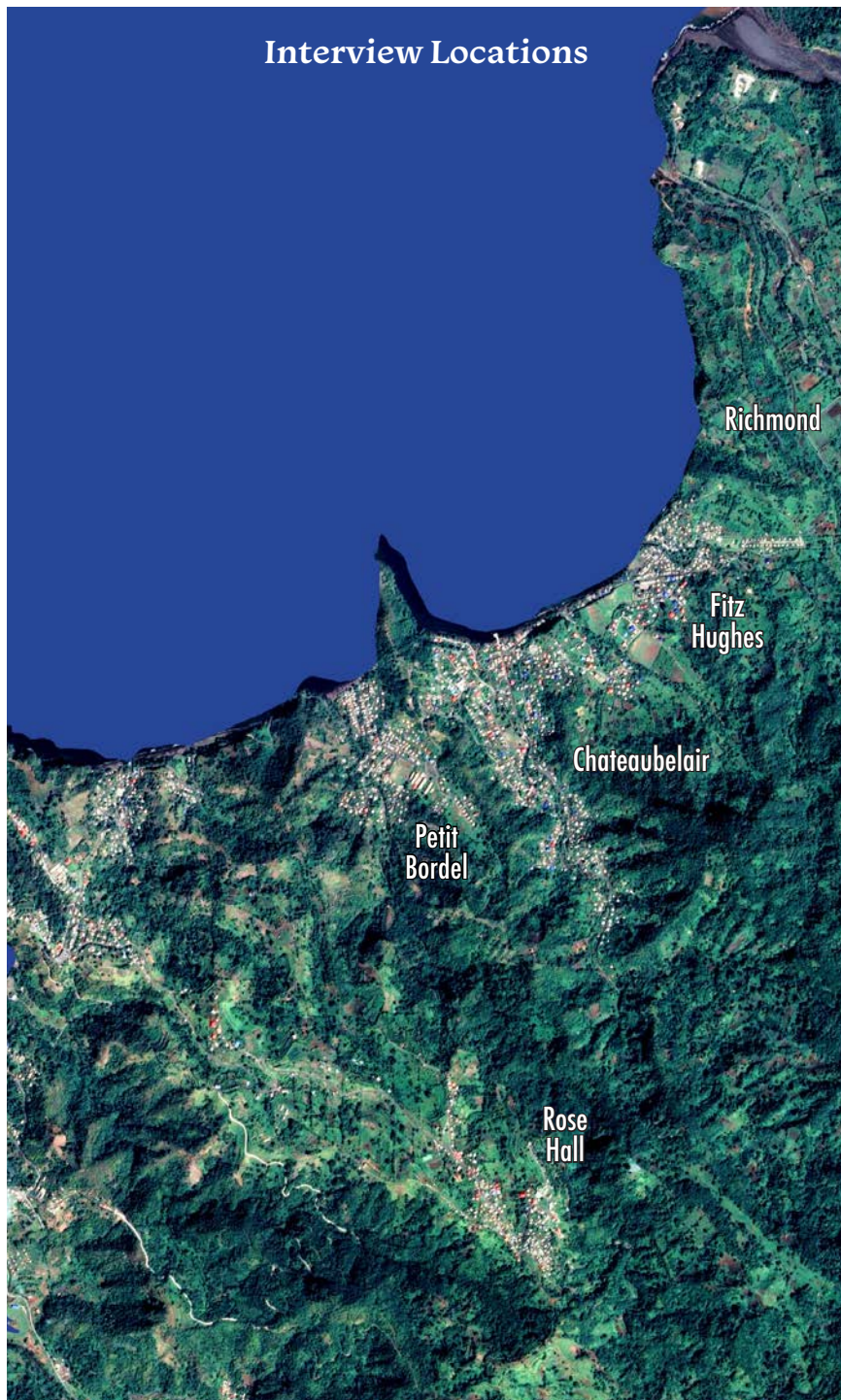


# FARMERS

*of St Vincent*



## Interview Locations



## Introduction

We are undergraduate students who attend Middlebury College in Vermont, USA. We traveled to St Vincent for the month of January 2024 for a class called “**Land and Society in St Vincent.**” When reading about St Vincent on the internet, much of the information available is in the form of academic articles or government policy briefings. We noticed that many of these resources often make the claim that St Vincent, despite its fertile soil and multiplicity of agricultural commodities, largely fails to consume its own local agriculture or export its products abroad. Many of these sources then suggest consumption and exportation of local agriculture as means of economic uplift.

However, in talking to farmers in St Vincent, it quickly became clear that these broad claims are not true for many people. We compiled some stories that highlight the shortcomings of many of these academic and government narratives regarding St Vincent. Putting together these stories would not have been at all possible without the people to whom the stories belong. We cannot thank everyone enough for their willingness to share their time and parts of their lives with us.

Sincerely,  
Natalia Smith & Anabelle Lapp



# 1

Henrietta has been a farmer since her youth. She farmed with her parents, and now she and her husband farm in Chateaubelair. She sells her food on the road in Chateaubelair, and she explains that when she has excess of a specific crop, she sells to traffickers (wholesalers), who then export the food to countries abroad. This is how she makes most of her money.

*“I like to weed, plant, root, I like all of it.”*

Most of what Henrietta eats is the food she’s grown. She finds this lifestyle to be healthiest.

One of her favorite dishes to make out of her crops is pumpkin soup, which calls for pumpkin, plantains, eddoe, and some other ingredients from her farm depending on what is available.

Henrietta believes there is a sense of community among local farmers, but she laments that there is also a problem with crops being stolen from farms. She thinks that having *“more people to buy and more people to plant”* could help diminish this problem by putting more food into circulation.

*“You know what you plant,  
you know what you eat.”*



## 2

Joane believes that farming is much more than a livelihood. *“I hope I get the health and strength to farm until I cannot make it,”* she said. Joane became interested in farming after meeting her boyfriend, and they plant many crops together now.

She sells her food to traders in Kingstown, but sometimes people stop by her house in Petit Bordel to buy her food as well. Joane enjoys selling her crops in Kingstown:

*“Farming is good because sometimes we can just put it on our backs, catch a ride, and then go to Kingstown.”*

She talked about the rise in harmful insects since the 2021 eruption, a challenge that has been impacting farmers in her community:

*“Since the volcano, there have been more insects, even when you use poison. I believe it’s from the ash.”*

Joane said that unfortunately, there is not much to be done about the rising insect levels.



Joane showing us the yellow and purple banister in front of her home in Petit Bordel.

## 3

Roseclare explained that, *“as a farmer, everyone knows you”* when we asked how people find out she is selling food. She prefers to sell her crops in Chateaubelair, where she is from, rather than going

to one of the Kingstown farmers markets. Sometimes she will sell her food on the streets to traders, and sometimes people will show up at her house to buy different crops, depending on the amount of food she has at the time.

She wishes she could still sell her food at the local Chateaubelair farmers market, which shut down permanently a few years back. Roseclare said she was able to make more money when she had the option to sell at this farmers market.

For Roseclare, farming feels much more focused on the **individual** rather than the **community**. However, she wishes that farmers in her community could band together to take back some of the power over buyers:

**“When you plant your food, the buyers is the one giving the price for your food. I think, as a farmer, *we should come together and hold what we say.***

**You just have to go with the market. I think that is *so unfair to farmers.*”**

*“I love farming. The handiwork, it’s with your hands. You can really make a money farming here,”* Roseclare said. But it also comes with hardships:

***“Farming is nice, but it’s not easy when people steal.”***

Roseclare has experienced theft of both her crops and livestock from her farmland in Richmond. After an experience where she caught a thief in the act of slitting the throat of one of the lambs on her property, she decided to shift her farm to property that is closer to her home. Roseclare attributes agricultural theft to people not caring about the lives and security of others, saying that *“they [thieves] don’t think about how it’s gonna impact me.”*

## 4

Angela and her husband got into farming simply from owning fertile land; they wanted to be able to put their land to use. Her husband will often sell the food they've grown in Rose Bank. Buyers will ask farmers to fulfill specific orders, the farmers will compile the desired foods, and they are then paid immediately. Other times he will sell to local supermarkets.

Sometimes, if Angela and her husband are unable to find buyers for specific crops, Angela will 'patch them up' (cut into portions) herself, package them, and sell them on the streets in Petit Bordel.

Due to health conditions, Angela is no longer able to farm, so her salary currently comes from St Vincent's government:

***"I get an income from the government..."***

***They can do more because that is just 280 dollars a month."***

Angela's son has helped her come up with unique ways to use the crops she grows to improve her health conditions.

*She told us that "I use the lettuce, cabbage, and kale, and I just blend them together and drink them. I also blend parsley, celery, and drink them. It had helped me a lot."*



*Lettuce beds made by Angela and her husband.*





Angela shared that the **eruption of La Soufrière** negatively impacted her farming in a variety of ways.

*“The eruption affects us a lot. I have livestock like goats and so, during the eruption, people take them. **People take a lot of things during the eruption.** You could not come in the area to reap your vegetables, so **they end up spoiled.**”*



She is also facing difficulties from soil erosion caused by the volcanic ash:

*“The rain washed away instead of seeping into the soil because the ashes are on top. That is what causing the erosion in many places. **There’s nothing you can do to help it.**”*

## 5

Samuel is a farmer in Rose Hall. *“We have always been into farming for as long as I know,”* he said, referring to him and his family. He sells his crops in Rose Hall and around the North Leeward side of St Vincent to anybody that comes across him.

*“Anything I produce here, you can eat it **without thinking**. Because it has no pesticides,”* Samuel said. He believes you can visibly recognize the better quality of agriculture grown without pesticides, just by looking at it.

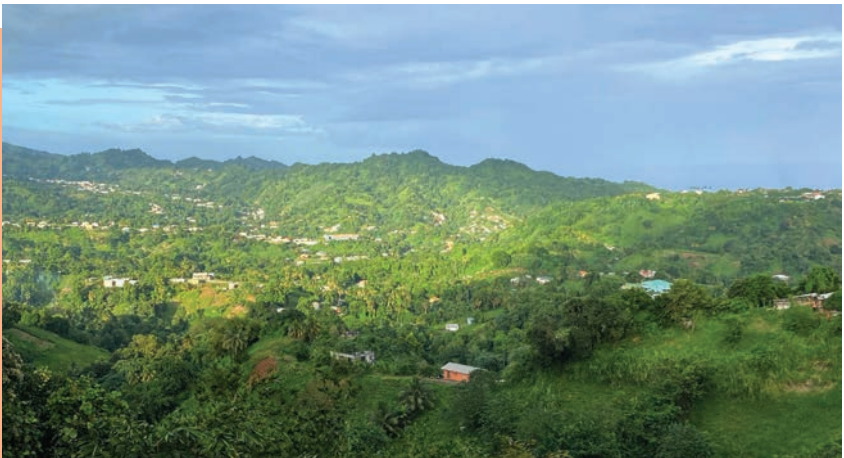
*“I love that **I know what I’m eating**. I don’t need pesticides,”* he shared, when talking about his favorite parts about being a farmer.

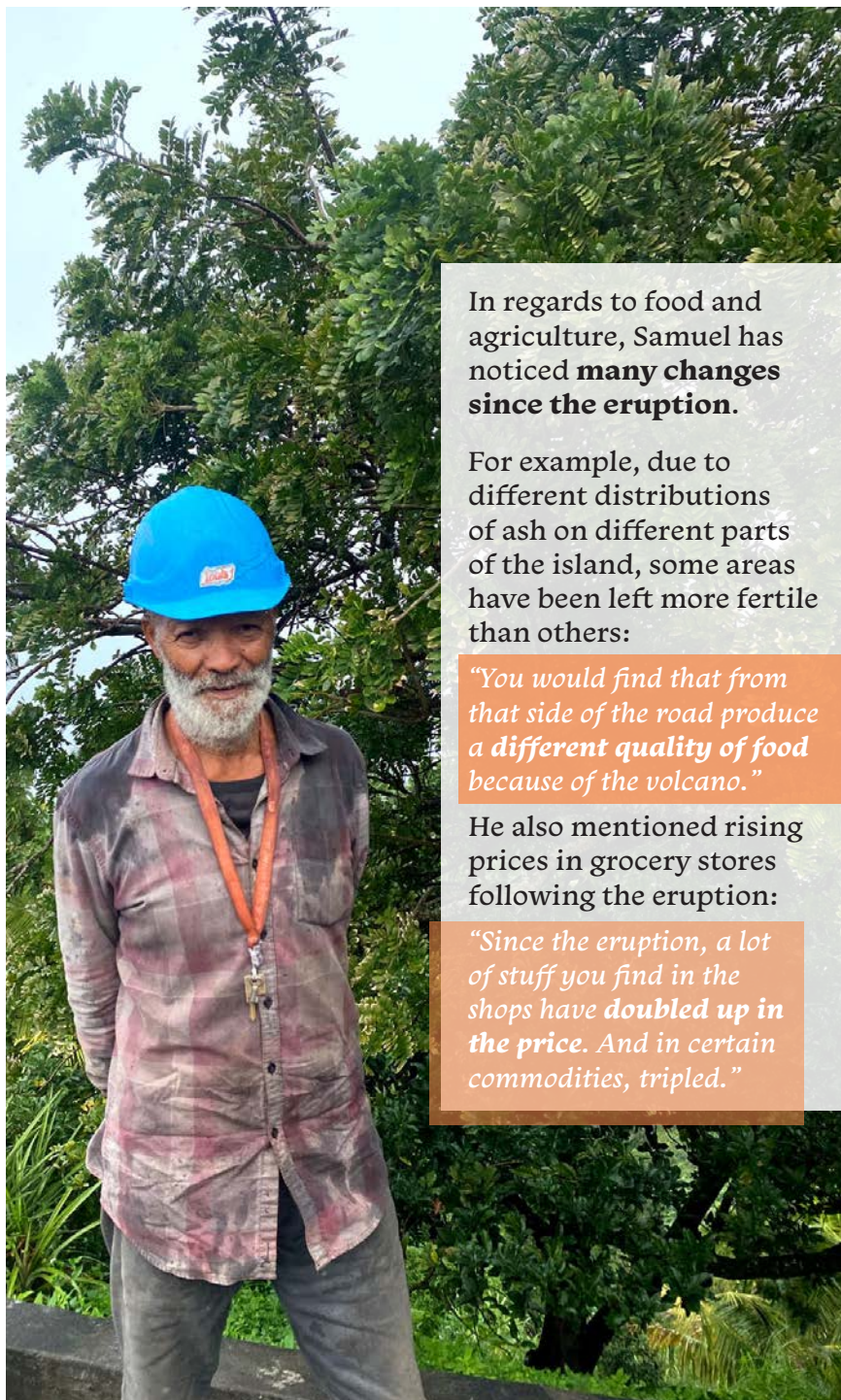
Samuel believes it is a problem when people don’t know where the food they’re eating is coming from:

*“The majority doesn’t even know when there’s pesticides or not. That is a problem. As long as you’re using pesticides, the product is **not free of all these chemicals**.”*

He went on to say, *“If you spray it a few times, **I don’t know if you can call it food**.”*

Samuel’s strong stance on pesticides came to him gradually over time and was informed by many different experiences. One formative experience was seeing his father farm when he was a child: *“My father wasn’t really a pesticide man. I can’t remember ever seeing him with a spray can.”*





In regards to food and agriculture, Samuel has noticed **many changes since the eruption.**

For example, due to different distributions of ash on different parts of the island, some areas have been left more fertile than others:

*“You would find that from that side of the road produce a **different quality of food** because of the volcano.”*

He also mentioned rising prices in grocery stores following the eruption:

*“Since the eruption, a lot of stuff you find in the shops have **doubled up in the price.** And in certain commodities, tripled.”*

A woman with a yellow headwrap and a pink t-shirt stands in a lush tropical field. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. Her right hand is resting on the trunk of a palm tree. The background is filled with green grass, various plants, and several palm trees under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the top right of the image in orange boxes.

***“I love being a farmer because I’m independent. I have no boss, nobody to tell me these different things. So, I’m proud to be a farmer. I be independent and self-employed at the same time.”***

*—Cliforna*

## 6

Cliforna learned how to farm from her mother and father. She decided she wanted to make farming her own livelihood after secondary school:

*“All my life I be farming, and I came out of secondary school and had no work.*

*I plant my own food, I know what I’m eating, and I’m making money.”*

She now leases land between Richmond and Fitz Hughes.

*“I eat and sell, cause I can’t eat everything. C.K. Greaves, they buy from us by the pound, and sometimes we sell to traffickers,” she said.*

She believes the government is not helping her and other farmers to its full capacity:

*“Since Soufrière erupt, a lot of the **plants go down**. They said they would help bring plants, but they ain’t bring none, and we have to help ourselves. It is something that **they always say but don’t do.**”*

Cliforna also mentioned facing issues with her agriculture being stolen.

*“Me leave them, because they can never take everything, so **I leave them to God**. Because the bible says ‘**Thou shalt not steal,**’”* she said, when talking about people who have stolen from her.

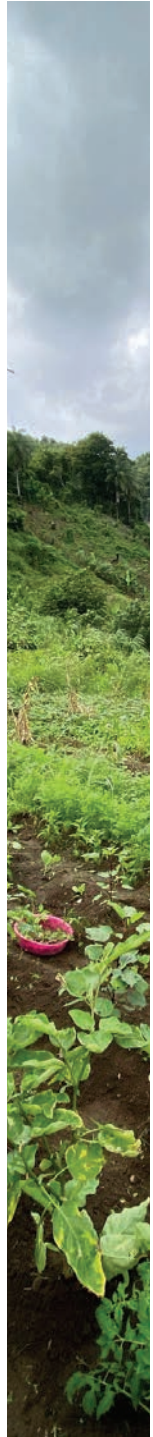


Jacinta grows her food right in her front yard; her boyfriend comes from a family of farmers, so she helps him out with the farming. *“I love farming. My boyfriend is the one that plants, and I help him. We grow tomato, potato, peppers, and more. We have the chichira [Armenian cucumber] . . . You can take out the inside and make a relish. Or, you can stir with other vegetables to make a soup,”* Angela said. She and her boyfriend began renting their land about a year ago, and they share some of their harvest with their landlord.

Since the eruption, Jacinta has noticed that fruit trees specifically **behave differently** than before:

*“Some things not coming good like before, we noticed a lot of fruit trees. Even the common lime tree, you can hardly get. You scarcely see limes now. I hear a lot of people complain about that, that since the eruption the **fruit trees get damaged.**”*

At this point, Jacinta said they don't grow enough produce to sell to bigger markets and grocery stores, but they're working to expand their growth. For right now, neighbors come to their home in Petit Bordel





when they're looking for a specific crop: *"We don't really go to big markets. People come here to buy food. People often stop by and ask if we have okra."* But Jacinta shared that what she loves most about farming is that she is able to eat the food she grows: *"I love to plant my own food. When I'm cooking, I can go and get my tomato and chive, and I don't have to buy it."*

She sees her farm as a grocery store right in her front yard. *"Sometimes we take okra and make punch with it to drink for ourselves. You boil the okra, wash them, cut them, strain it, mix in the blender, you put your milk in, your nutmeg, your cinnamon, and you drink it cold. Some people prepare it differently,"* Jacinta said. She also likes to make pies and sorrel juice around the holidays.

Jacinta uses her farming to care for her family:

*"I take care of my garden and also my children . . . I have a son with Down syndrome, so I make my own juice for him instead of buying juice boxes. It's much healthier and better."*

With help from family that lives abroad and her garden at home, Jacinta is able to **fully support her son**. She prefers this over receiving help from the government: *"I don't really want to depend on the government for everything."*



A photograph of a lush tropical landscape. In the foreground, there are various green plants, including a large banana plant and some tall grasses. The middle ground shows a dense forest of trees and palms. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a soft, hazy sky. The overall scene is vibrant and natural.

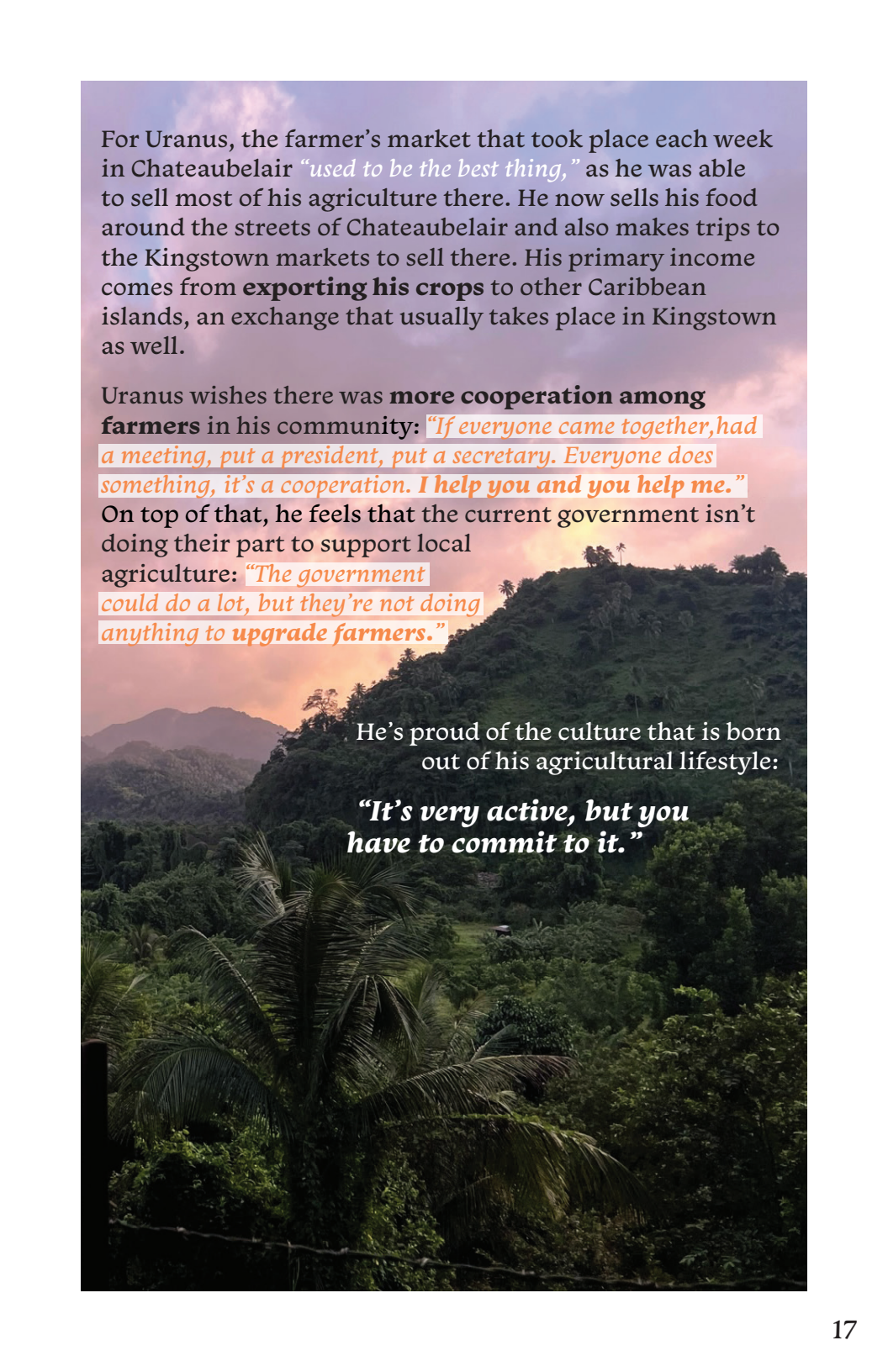
## 8

**U**ranus is a farmer from Chateaubelair. His parents were both farmers, and he's grown up farming.

*“Farming has always been a part of my life.”* He grows his crops on a five acre plot of land, and though he is looking to hire some workers to help him maintain the land, he works by himself right now because, in his eyes, it's been **difficult to find young people** who are willing to work. He prefers to use **natural fertilizers rather than chemical pesticides**, and since the volcanic eruption in 2021, he makes a homemade fertilizer by mixing volcanic ash into his soil.

*“My land is my breadbasket.”*





For Uranus, the farmer's market that took place each week in Chateaubelair *"used to be the best thing,"* as he was able to sell most of his agriculture there. He now sells his food around the streets of Chateaubelair and also makes trips to the Kingstown markets to sell there. His primary income comes from **exporting his crops** to other Caribbean islands, an exchange that usually takes place in Kingstown as well.

Uranus wishes there was **more cooperation among farmers** in his community: *"If everyone came together, had a meeting, put a president, put a secretary. Everyone does something, it's a cooperation. I help you and you help me."*

On top of that, he feels that the current government isn't doing their part to support local agriculture: *"The government could do a lot, but they're not doing anything to upgrade farmers."*

He's proud of the culture that is born out of his agricultural lifestyle:

*"It's very active, but you have to commit to it."*



## 10

Irvin, like many farmers on the North Leeward side of St Vincent, has been in the agricultural world since his childhood:

*“From childhood, we grew up on a small estate on the northern side, so I was into farming from small with my father.”*

For the past twenty years, he has leased farmland from the government, and he **loves being self-employed** and working at his own pace. He shared that the land on which he farms was formerly part of an estate owned by a plantation holder, but in the 1980s, the government bought the land and began leasing it to local farmers.

Irvin said that the government sometimes assigns different people to come and assist farmers with their land, *“but usually they don’t really put the effort into it.”* As a result, he employs people from time to time to help him take care of his large plot of land. He sells the food that he grows to C.K. Greaves supermarket as well as more

local grocery stores near Richmond, where he farms.

Although Irvin received some small amounts of government assistance following the volcanic eruption, he believes it *“could have been better.”*

Though volcanic ash typically helps to fertilize soil, many of his plants suffered from being covered in too much ash, as his farming plot is so close to La Soufrière. He believes that **better communication** between the government and the farmers they are promising to help could improve the lives of locals trying to earn a living from farming.

*“I would say we cooperate with each other since it’s a **small community** and everybody knows each other. No competition with other farmers,”* Irvin said. At the same time, though, he shared that it is very **expensive** to buy the equipment and materials needed for farming, such as seeds. This is made more difficult by the fact that all farmers are vying for the same products.

Cecily is known throughout St Vincent's North Leeward side for her homemade chocolate. She sources her cocoa from local farmers, and she then roasts, spices, liquifies, cools, cuts, and packages the beans, ultimately creating her signature chocolate sticks for tea. She learned this process from her grandmother.

*"When I was small, I lived with my grandmother. She died at ninety nine, she used to patch [roast] cocoa," Cecily said. "I don't know how she get it from, but I meet her doing it."*

Cecily's grandmother processed her cocoa beans before the invention of the cocoa mill. *"Before there was a cocoa mill, she used to have a flat stone. We grew up knowing the stone that her grandmother used. My great great grandmother used to roll the cocoa into liquid with her stone,"* Cecily's daughter Jennifer said.

Jennifer explained that her mom does not take her chocolate-making lightly. *"It's a very meticulous process,"* she said. ***"No one can really replicate it."***

Jennifer grew up in St Vincent with her seven siblings, and she now works as a nurse in Saskatchewan where she lives



with her son. She was back home for the month visiting Cecily when we stopped by.

*“It’s a livelihood. We grew up with the cocoa,” Jennifer said. “Every single one of us patched cocoa. When I come home, I’m home, so it’s right back to cleaning and helping when you are home.”*



Jennifer shared that she never learned how to roll the cocoa when she was little, and she wants to learn this from Cecily now that her mom is getting older.

*“All the children had their share of patching and grinding the cocoa, but we never rolled it. It was always her,” she said, pointing at her mom. “Mama did everything to send all seven of us through school. She did everything. And she never had a professional job, so to speak, either. Her job was what she did with her hands.”*

Through word of mouth alone, Cecily receives requests for her chocolate sticks from around the world each week. A tourist traveling in St Vincent might stumble across her chocolate and tell their friends back home about it. When we were visiting, she was preparing a big shipment to be exported to Canada. *“I don’t know, but I know Mama’s chocolate is the best chocolate,”* Jennifer explained.



*“This is gold right here.  
This is worth a lot of money.”*

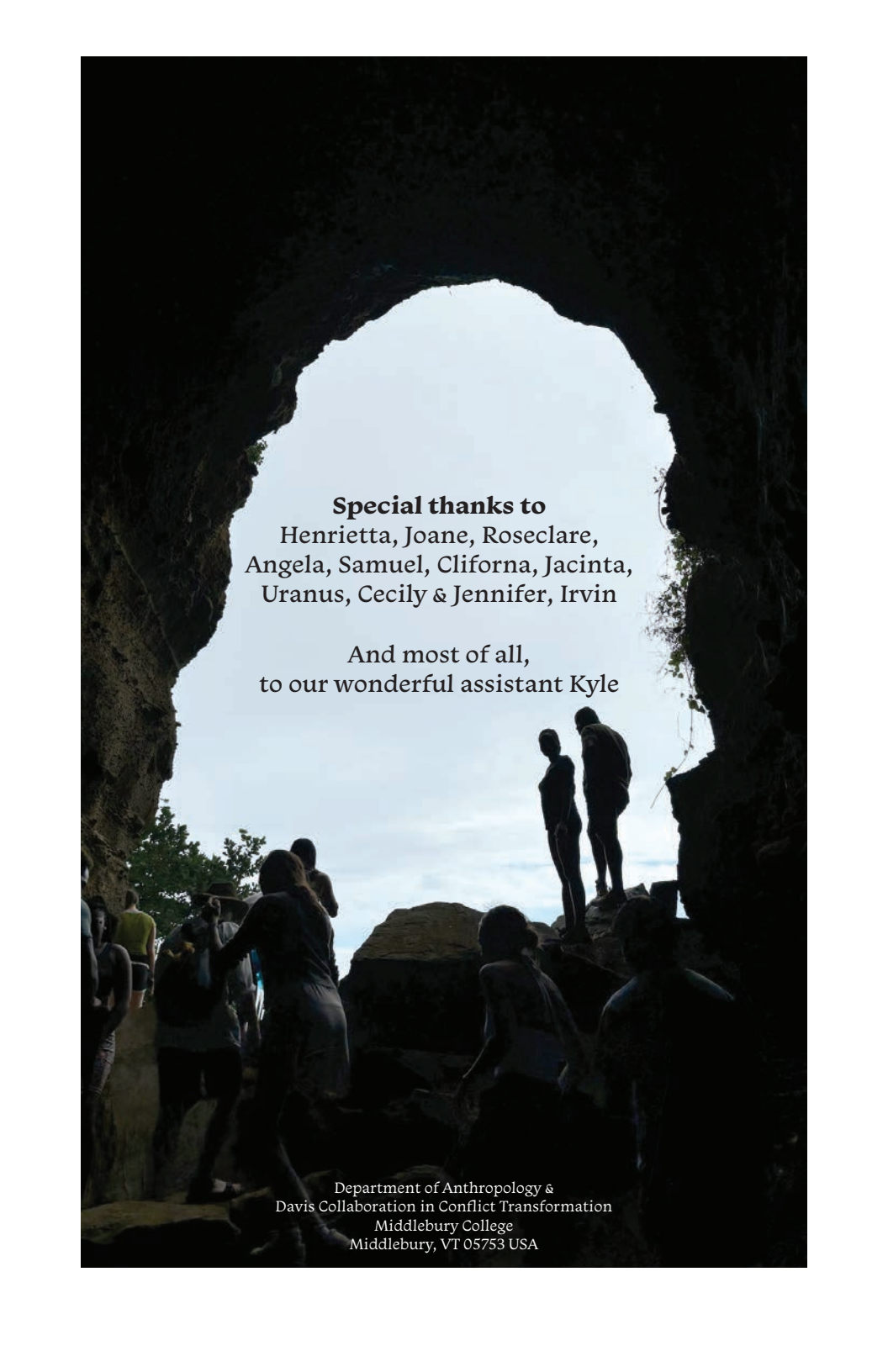
*—Jennifer*



## Conclusion

Having the opportunity to talk with people about their experiences was such a privilege and meant the world to us. From our conversations, it is clear that the experiences of farmers and vendors in St Vincent cannot be pared down to one single narrative, though many people's experiences overlap and intertwine with others'. It is also clear that many people's stories defy notions that Vincentians do not consume local agriculture or export their agricultural products. We believe these stories speak for themselves.



A group of people is silhouetted against a bright sky, looking out from a dark cave opening. The scene is framed by the dark, jagged edges of the cave entrance. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, looking towards the light. In the middle ground, two people stand on a rock ledge, looking out. The background shows a bright, overcast sky with some clouds.

**Special thanks to**  
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