

the
HIDEAWAY
at Hull Bay

The Most Valuable Crop You're Not Selling

Agritourism as a revenue supplement for Virgin Islands farmers

Lee Steiner

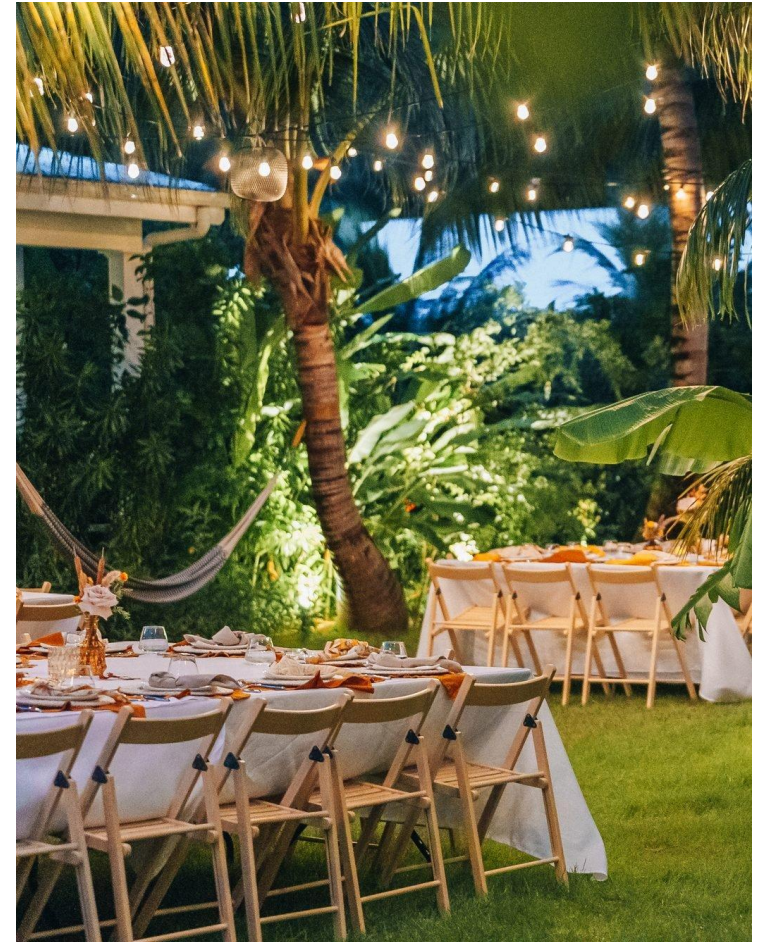
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What if the highest-return product of your farm isn't a crop at all?

Not something you plant. Not something you harvest.
Not even something you can hold in your hands.

The experience of simply being there.



People pay for feelings, escape, beauty, and memories.



Who I am

St. Thomian. Farmer. Host. I'm here to help farmers become hospitality businesses, not hospitality businesses become farmers.



The Hideaway at Hull Bay

Owner-operator since 2017. Lodging, restaurant, and a working food forest on St. Thomas.



Nearly 1000 students hosted

Kindergarten through university. Our food forest doubles as an outdoor classroom, in partnership with UVI.



Licensed commercial farmer since 2017

I know what growing here costs.



Community service

Past FAC Board Member (Fisheries Advisory Committee), Past DRI Board Member (Charlotte Amalie Downtown Revitalization Initiative), Past VI Port Authority Board of Directors.

The reality we farm in

97%

of the territory's food is imported

We were once the breadbasket of the Caribbean.

619

farms in the Virgin Islands

2023 Census of Agriculture

\$6,787

average sales per farm, per year

Gross sales. Before water, feed, fuel, or your time.

That last number should stop everyone in this room.

Why that number is so low



Water

A dry tropical territory dependent on rainfall. When cisterns run dry, trucked water can top \$100 per 1,000 gallons.



Power

Electricity costs roughly 5x the US mainland, putting cold storage and processing out of reach for most farms.



Storms

Everyone in this room remembers 2017. Some farms still haven't fully recovered from Irma and Maria.



No safety net

Without the US mainland's subsidies and support infrastructure, most farmers struggle to turn a profit here.

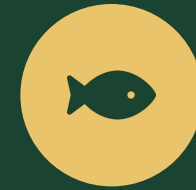
Nobody is coming to save us. So: how do we create new revenue with exactly what we already have?

Sell the experience, not just the crop

You live your farm every day, so to you it's work. To somebody who lives behind a screen, walking your land, picking fruit off your trees, and eating something that came out of the ground that morning is a memory they will pay for.

Proof already on our waters: charter fishing.

Commercial fishing is one of the hardest jobs there is. Yet visitors pay premium rates for the experience of that same day's work. The fish is the bonus. The day on the water is the product.



**Same work.
Different product.
Premium price.**

Your farm can do exactly what the charter boats do.

This is not a theory

\$1.26B

**earned by US farms from
agritourism in 2022**

Up 12.4% from 2017, inflation-adjusted

\$44,000

**average annual agritourism income
per operation**

6x the average VI farm's total sales

65%

**of agritourism farms are small,
low-income farms**

*Farm income under \$50,000. This is a
small-farm lifeline.*

And we have something Iowa never will: Nearly 1 million visitors already fly to the USVI every year. The market drives past our farm gates daily. We just haven't opened the gate.

Start with one glamping tent

Glamping = glamorous camping. A quality safari or bell tent that guests book on Airbnb or Hipcamp just like a villa.



Guest cottage at The Hideaway. Your version can be a canvas tent.

The setup

- Canvas tent on a raised platform
- Real bed, good linens
- Solar lighting
- Compost toilet or simple bathhouse
- No foundation, no years of construction
- Storm coming? Take it down and store it

Total startup cost

\$8,000

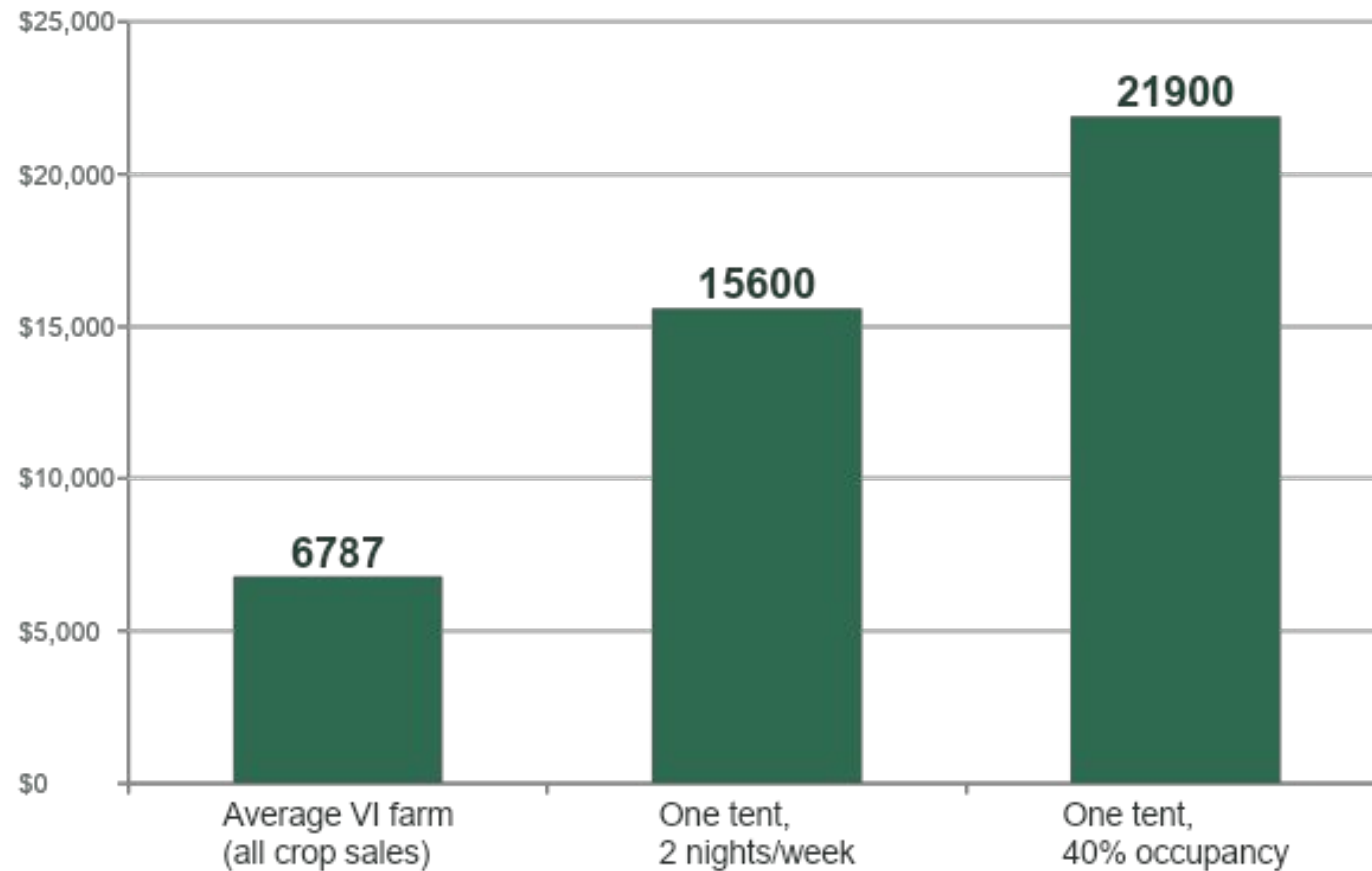
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\$15,000

One-time. Most operators recoup it in year one.

The one-tent math

Conservative rate: \$150 per night



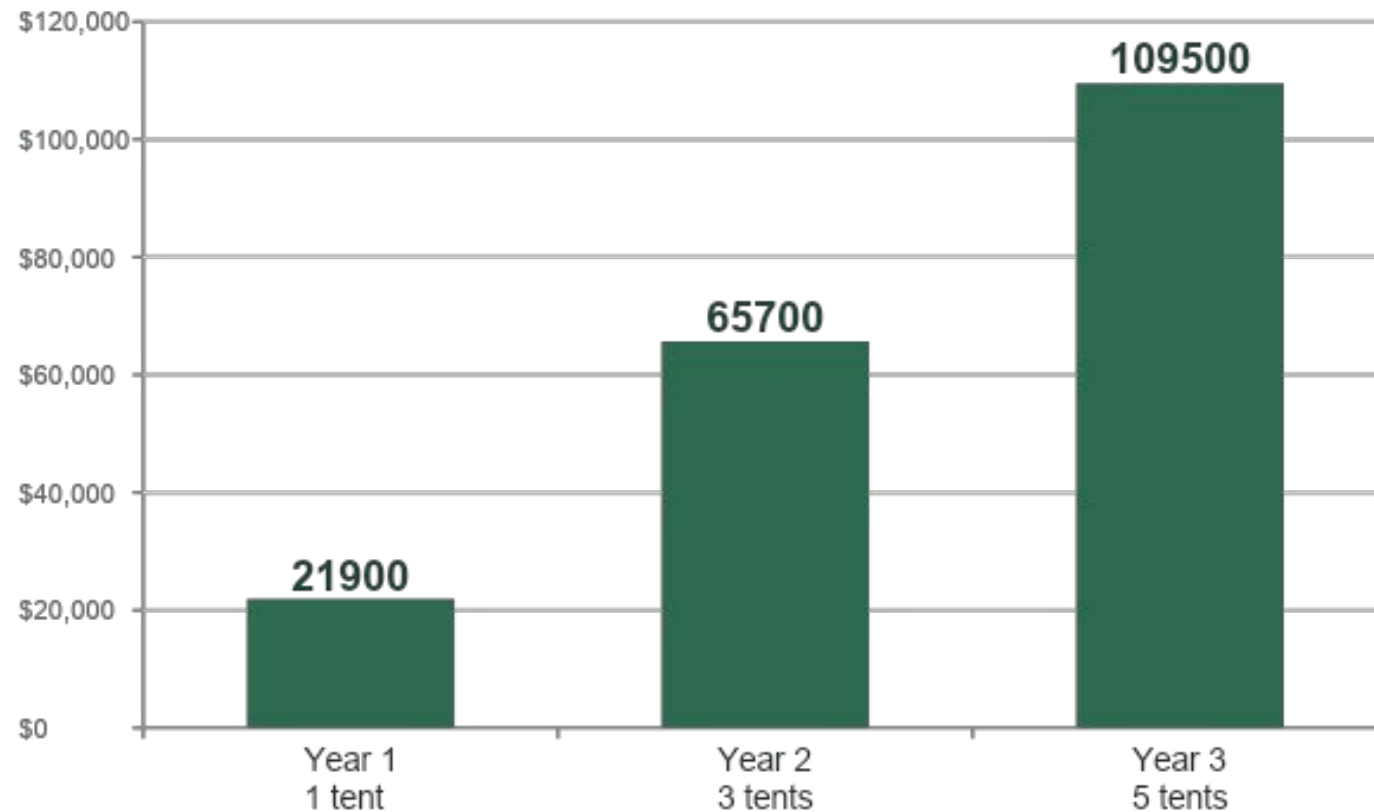
One tent, booked just 2 nights a week, grosses more than

2x

the total sales of the average Virgin Islands farm.

Now grow it: five tents in three years

Same \$150 per night. Same 40% occupancy. Add tents as the bookings prove out.



By year three, five tents gross

16x

the average VI farm's total sales
— over \$109,000 a year.

Best part: each tent pays for the next. Tent one's cash flow buys tents two and three; those buy four and five. The farm funds its own growth.

The tent is only the beginning

A guest sleeping on your farm spends money all day long:



Direct sales at full retail

Your eggs, fruit, and honey. No middleman, no fees, no price war with imports.



Tours & experiences

\$15+ a head for a farm tour, harvest morning, or u-pick session.



Farm-to-table dinners

Premium prices for a meal under the stars, grown steps from the table.



Free marketing

Guests post everything. Every stay markets your farm to the world at no cost.



Grown at Hideaway Farm, served at The Shack.

Your produce stops competing on price and starts selling on story. Nobody haggles over the mango they picked themselves.

What The Hideaway at Hull Bay taught me

1

Have a goal and a plan

If you fail to plan, plan to fail. Your plan will change, and it should. Know your direction, take action, never stop.

2

Reverse engineer it

Start from the goal and work backwards so the plan actually leads where you want to go.

3

Be ready to pivot

If the tomatoes lose to the pests and the bananas thrive, grow the bananas. Failure is part of the process.

4

It's about how people feel

Not being the biggest or the best. Nature does the heavy lifting. Your job is to be present and share it.



FFA students touring our food forest classroom.

Nearly 1,000 kids later, I can tell you: the way you get people to care about agriculture is to let them experience it.

What I'm asking of this room



Farmers

- Pick one experience to offer before the end of the year: a tour, a u-pick morning, a farm dinner
- Test demand before spending a dollar on a tent
- Then start with one unit. Prove it, grow it.



Community leaders

- A clear, simple pathway for permitting for farm stays
- Recognize agritourism in our agriculture and tourism plans
- Marketing support through the Dept. of Tourism



UVI & researchers

- Feasibility data and benchmarks for VI farm stays
- Workshops and extension support
- Measure the impact so policy can follow

Every farm stay keeps visitor dollars on island, in local hands, growing local food.

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Open the gate.

*The one thing no boat can import is the experience of being on a
Virgin Islands farm with a Virgin Islands farmer.*

Lee Steiner | The Hideaway at Hull Bay, St. Thomas