

Image not found or type unknown

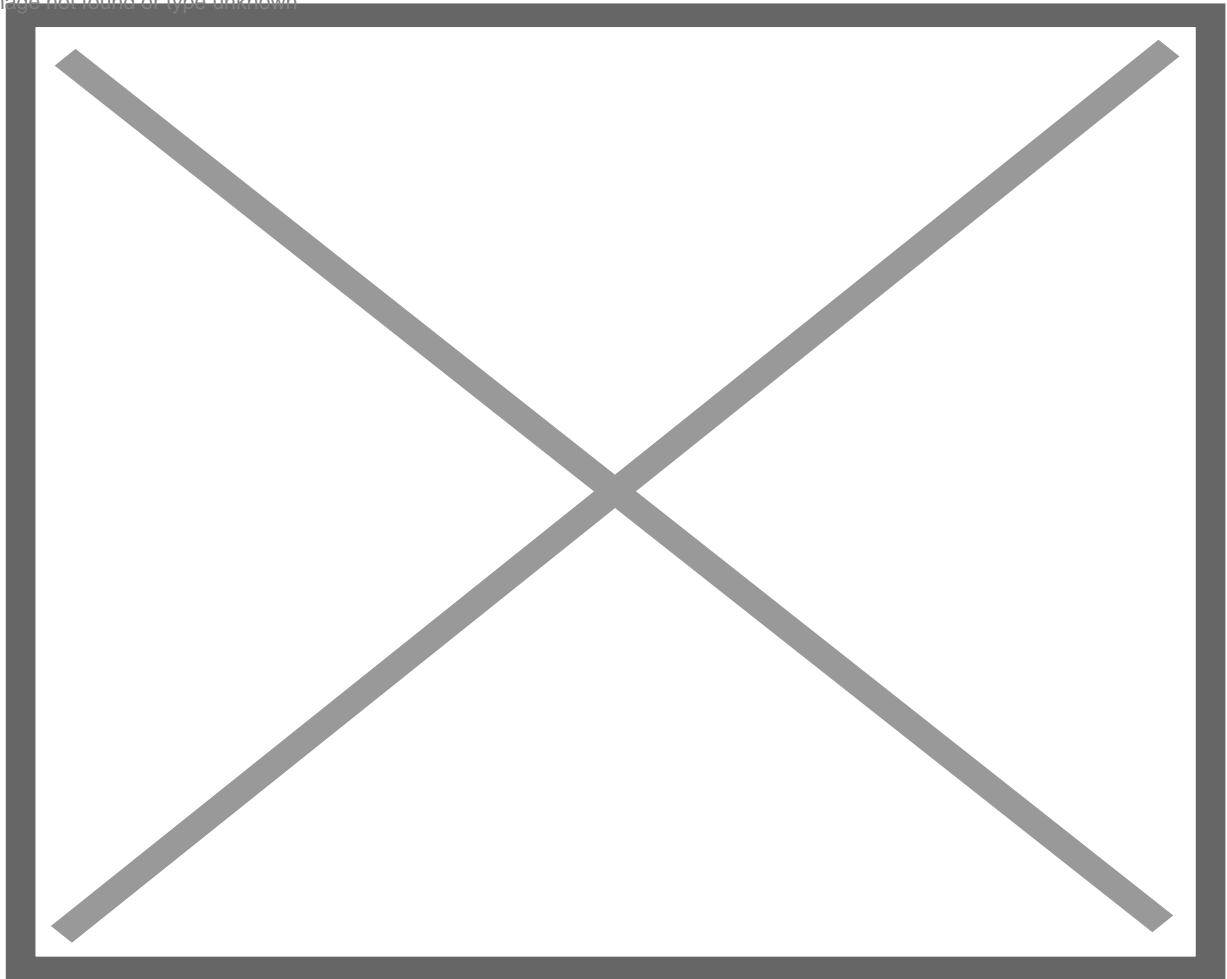
## Bryan Proposes Restricting Food Stamps to Healthy Choices, Sees Farm Bill as Vital for Reviving Agriculture in USVI

**At a governors' meeting, Governor Bryan outlines the struggles of the Virgin Islands' agricultural sector, emphasizing the need for legislative support**

Agriculture / **Published On March 01, 2024 06:08 AM /**

Janeke Simon **March 01, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



At a recent meeting of governors in Washington to discuss priorities for the upcoming federal Farm Bill, Governor Albert Bryan highlighted challenges facing the territory's agricultural sector and expressed his hopes for support through new legislation.

Mr. Bryan was the co-chair of the Community Investment Task Force session at the 2024 Winter Meeting of the National Governors Association. During the meeting last Saturday, he noted that

while the Virgin Islands is considered rural America, only 3% of food consumed locally is currently produced within the territory.

The USVI has set itself the ambitious goal of increasing food production to meet 35% of consumption levels by 2040 in order to address high food costs and affordability issues for residents. However, farming in the Virgin Islands faces significant pressures, including limited access to crop insurance, multi-year drought, and the impacts of climate change – most painfully felt in 2017 as two powerful hurricanes toppled much of the territory’s infrastructure and vegetation. Mr. Bryan called for the new Farm Bill to address these challenges and support the islands' agricultural revival.

“Part of this is about inclusiveness, remembering that the territories are part of America, they’re your America,” he told his fellow governors, noting that VI farmers are not covered by federal crop insurance programs.

Efforts like the Local Agriculture Market Program established in the 2018 Farm Bill could help by creating regional food plans and providing technical assistance to farmers, said Jennifer Lester Moffitt, U.S. Department of Agriculture under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs. The USDA has also developed regional food business centers to foster local food system connectivity and resilience. American Rescue Plan Act funds have been used to shore up the programs and extend their lives.

Mr. Bryan commended the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the summer EBT program where children on assistant lunch programs receive meals even when school is not in session. He noted that poverty impacts more than just the financial circumstances of children and families.

“It’s not only an economic condition, it’s a mental condition as well,” he said. Mr. Bryan suggested that programs such as SNAP be re-evaluated so that benefits would only be able to be used for foods that meet a particular health profile. “When you look at what people have in their carts, it’s not green leafy vegetables and good stuff. It’s TV dinners and popsicles, and a lot of pork and fatty foods, a lot of starches,” he argued. “Trying to change that also will do our nation good.”

While the country awaits a new farm bill ahead of the current measure’s expiration this September, Mr. Bryan hopes the next piece of legislation to address agricultural production in the country will include provisions to help the Virgin Islands improve prospects for farming in the territory. “Not only do we need support for our ranchers and our farmers, but for our young people, getting them back to the soil and understanding that this is part of living,” he said.