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# Water Supply Improvement Projects in the Pipeline for Bordeaux and Lower Love, Reports VIDA

## Dept. of Agriculture outlines plans including new cisterns, renovated wells, and the Bordeaux Watershed Improvement Project to boost water supply; $2 million in federal funds allocated with additional support on the way

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Nelcia Charlemagne October 10, 2024

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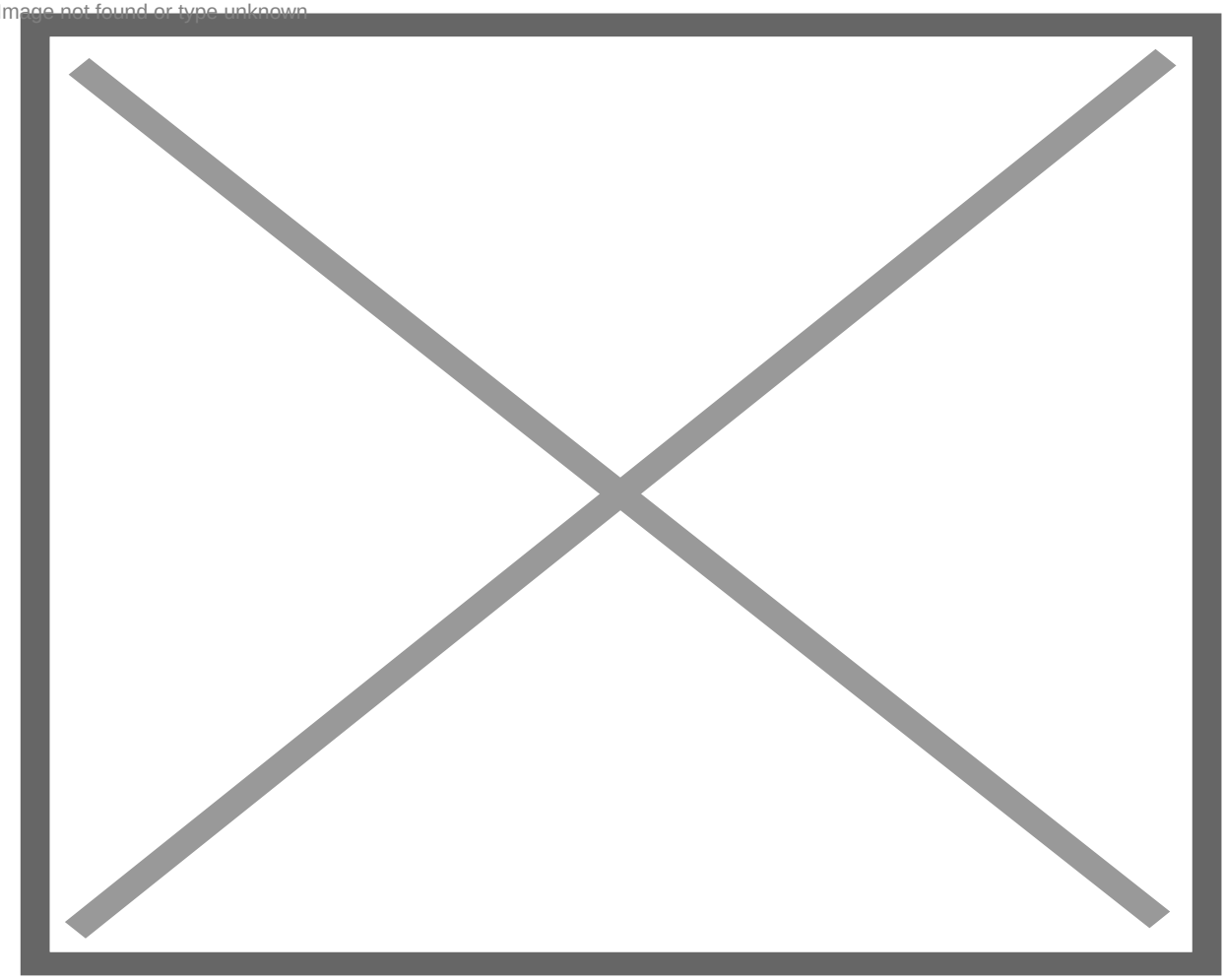

**2015 drought on St. Croix.** **By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The ability to provide a consistent water supply to the territory's farmers remains a challenge for the Department of Agriculture, one which Commissioner Louis Petersen says the department is making significant efforts to ameliorate.

In an update before the Committee on Economic Development and Finance on Wednesday, Mr. Petersen outlined plans to bolster water infrastructure territory-wide, including “the bulk purchase of water tanks,” using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. He also reported that VIDA is working with the Office of Management and Budget to finalize the release of funds for several projects.

“Specific examples of these proposed projects include the construction of two 100,000-gallon cisterns in Estate Bordeaux, the renovation of an abandoned cistern in Estate Dorothea, [and] the water well expansion project in the community gardens in Estate Lower Love in St. Croix,” Mr. Petersen shared. The latter has been estimated to cost $80,000, but an engineer will soon be tasked to “properly scope it out so that it goes to bid with a common scope for everyone to bid on.”

The Estate Lower Love project will “pressurize the system” by connecting existing wells south of the area through pipes in the northerly direction toward the community garden. “When that is finished, there'll be an increased supply of water,” he said to committee chair Senator Javan James.

Mr. Petersen told lawmakers he is particularly “enthused about the ongoing collaboration and agreement between the Department of Agriculture and the Caribbean Area Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement the Bordeaux Watershed Improvement Project."

That project is expected to “enhance water quantity and quality for farmers.” The scope of work includes the renovation of sentiment ponds in the area, intended to “maximize water holding capacity, enhancing water collection and storage.” It will include storage structures and will facilitate the expansion of the water distribution system and improved road access, Mr. Petersen relayed. “To date, more than $2 million of federal funding has been allotted to the project, with additional funds to be assigned for the design and construction phases,” he reported.

The project involves lining an unspecified number of natural and manmade ponds with concrete during the rehabilitation process, a plan that baffled Senator Diane Capehart. “USDA NRCS is approving lining a pond with concrete?” she questioned. But according to Mr. Petersen – who also admitted he was initially doubtful – “this system that they're going to be using is one that has been tested, tried and proved in other locations.”

VIDA will host a public meeting on October 15th to share more information on the project, including construction of access roads and a project timetable. The meeting is also an opportunity to facilitate public input.

Senator Marvin Blyden, aware of the plight of farmers in Estate Bordeaux, wondered when the watershed project would begin to benefit them. “We have some short-term and some long-term plans,” Mr. Petersen replied. The short-term plans include the construction of a pump station that is approximately 90% complete which will expand access to distribution lines, providing more farmers with access to water. “The pumps that exist right now are really overworked,” he said.

The commissioner said VIDA’s plan is to “create storage structures with a goal of harvesting as much water as possible so that when it does not rain, we have water resources.”