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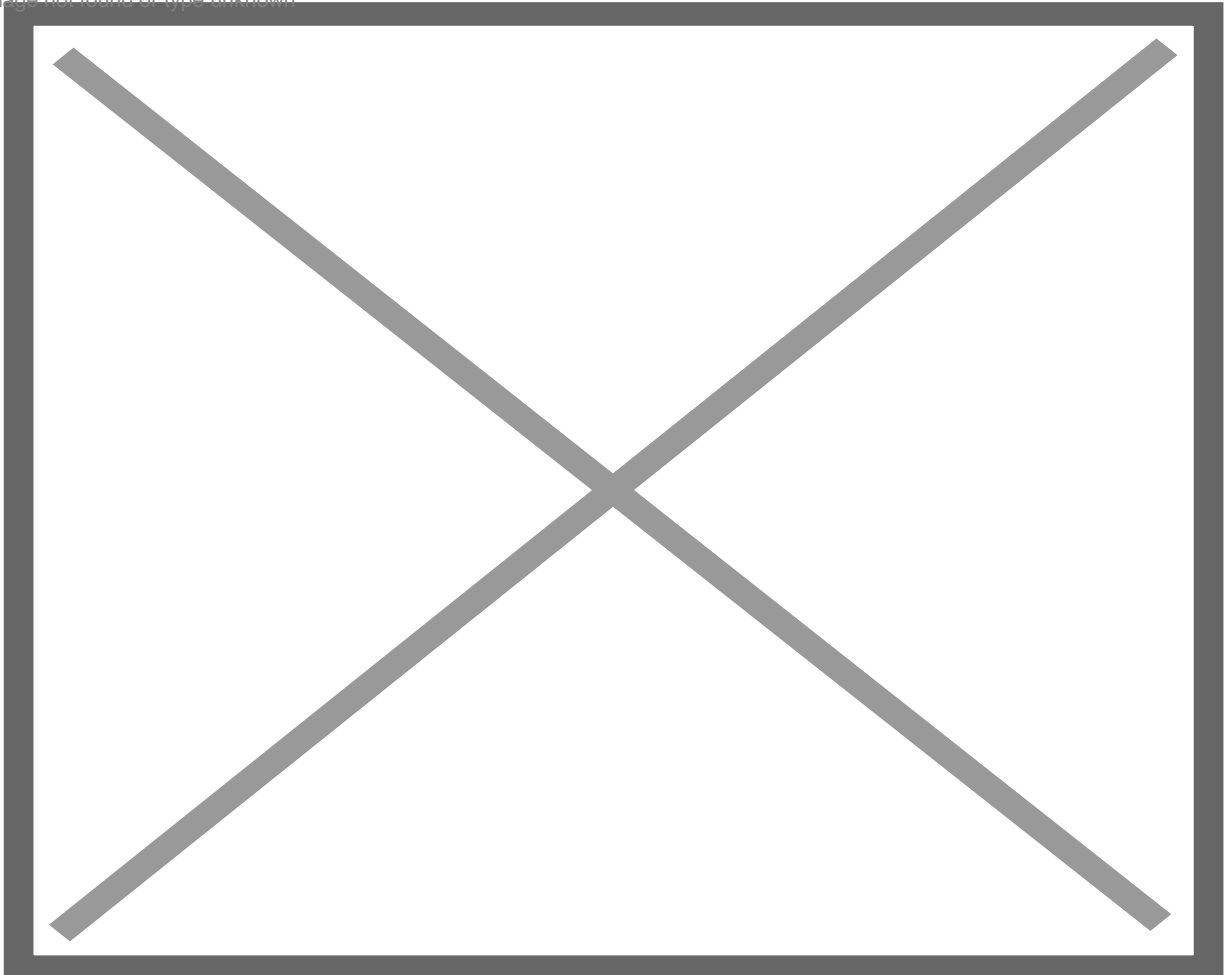
## Proposed \$230 Billion USDA Cuts Could Threaten Food Assistance for Virgin Islanders, Plaskett Warns at Agrifest

At the Agriculture and Food Fair, Delegate Stacey Plaskett highlighted the potential consequences of \$230 billion in proposed USDA cuts, which could reduce access to school meal programs, SNAP benefits, and food aid for low-income Virgin Islanders.

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United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Headquarters Building in Washington, D.C. By. GETTY IMAGES

During Saturday's opening ceremony for this year's Agriculture and Food Fair on St. Croix, V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett reiterated Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen's call

for improving local food security, warning that many safety-net programs relied on by Virgin Islanders may become less accessible under proposed federal budget cuts.

The upcoming Congressional budget includes \$230 billion in proposed cuts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture over the course of 10 years, a move that could impact school meal programs, SNAP benefits, and food aid for low-income students and families. “We here in the Virgin Islands, we don't just need to tighten our belts,” Plaskett said. “That's austerity measures that we know we need, but we need to create self-sufficiency, food security, to come up with innovative ways that we will make up that gap for our students and for our elders.”

Plaskett referenced the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a program that enables schools to provide free meals to all students in low-income areas. Recent federal budget proposals aim to limit access to CEP, which could lead to approximately 24,000 schools losing eligibility nationwide. Locally, this could reduce access to school meals for thousands of Virgin Islands students.

Additionally, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits could face drastic cuts, impacting food security for low-income households. While proponents of the budget argue the cuts target waste and inefficiencies, analysts have warned that they could reduce overall benefits and restrict eligibility.

These proposed cuts are part of a budget resolution and have not yet been enacted into law. The legislative process involves further negotiations and approvals before any budgetary changes are finalized.

Plaskett also addressed the Meals on Wheels program, which is already [struggling with underfunding locally](#). “Additional cuts are coming,” she cautioned. “We cannot rely on the federal government for that assistance. We've got to figure it out ourselves.”

Plaskett stressed the need for agriculture as a long-term solution. “As we look ahead, it's impossible to ignore this. Along with environmental changes that are happening around us, agriculture is not only [an] important part of our past, but it will be critical to our future.”

The annual Agriculture and Food Fair she noted, is a key opportunity to highlight agricultural development and explore solutions for greater food self-sufficiency. “It's not just a demonstration of what we have been able to do, but an ability for us to look ahead to... how we can become the Wakanda of the United States,” Plaskett declared. “I know that we can do it together.”