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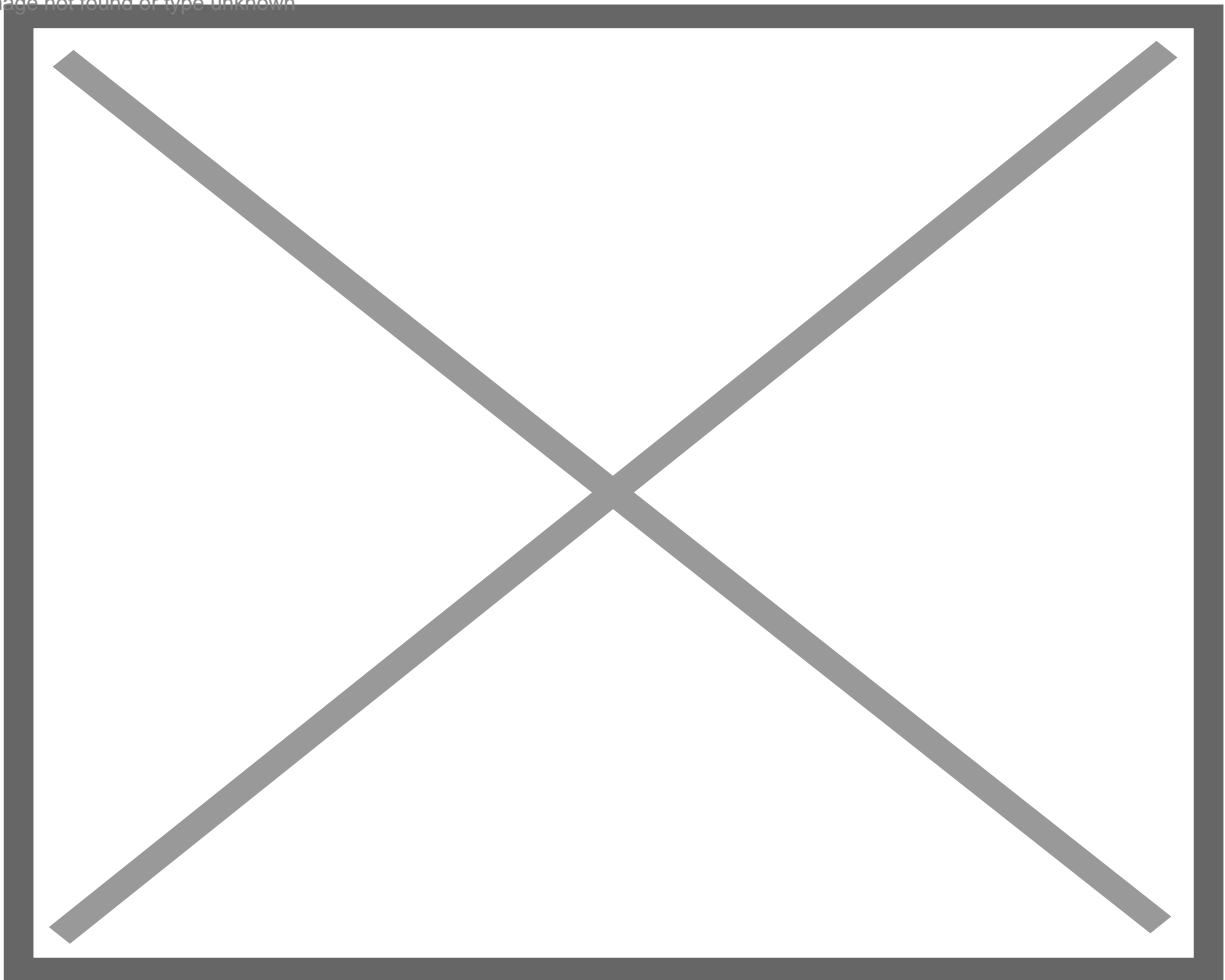
Dept. of Agriculture Stresses Urgency of Self-Sufficiency at 2025 Agrifest

At Agrifest 2025, officials emphasized food security and self-sufficiency, highlighting grants, infrastructure projects, and efforts to engage youth in farming. Residents were urged to boost local food production amid potential federal policy shifts.

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"Agriculture is too serious of a business, too sacred of a business to be in show business," said Louis Petersen, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, as he welcomed attendees to the 2025 Agriculture and Food Fair. His comments aimed to convey that Agrifest is more than just a showcase of the territory's agricultural bounty—it serves as a platform to strengthen connections between farmers, vendors, and consumers beyond the three-day event.

Mr. Petersen framed his remarks within the territory's renewed push for agricultural self-sufficiency, praising the collaborative efforts of the Department of Agriculture, the Local Food and Farm Council, and other agricultural organizations over the past year. Among the department's achievements, he highlighted \$500,000 in grants issued to farmers as a major milestone.

Looking ahead, Mr. Petersen outlined upcoming initiatives, including new water infrastructure projects, the acquisition of modern farming equipment, and the establishment of a community garden on St. John. He also noted that efforts are underway to reestablish the charter of the Future Farmers of America, aiming to increase student engagement in agriculture and develop the next generation of farmers.

Co-chair of the Local Food and Farm Council, Dr. Safiya George, echoed Mr. Petersen's commitment to expanding agricultural support, stating that securing additional grant funding for farmers and fishers remains a top priority. She also noted the importance of data-driven planning to ensure that agricultural initiatives align with the needs of the territory's residents.

The need to boost local food production has never been more urgent, Petersen warned, citing the potential impact of shifting federal policies. "The posture of the current administration threatens to impact our resources that we normally get from the federal government," he stated.

Encouraging greater public participation in agriculture, Petersen urged residents to take small but meaningful steps toward food production. "Please do something around your home. You know what to do, right?" he asked, reinforcing the importance of local food sustainability.

The Department of Agriculture, he assured, remains committed to supporting these efforts. "This is a time of urgency. A time of seriousness, and we all need to be a part of the response team."