

The Virgin Islands Consortium

After Drought, Heavy Rainfall Brings Relief—and New Challenges—to USVI and Puerto Rico

Following early-year dryness, both territories are now drought-free, with saturated soils and overflowing streams—but farmers face delays, erosion, and rising management costs due to unusually intense rainfall.

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Erosion at a farm entrance where saturated soil gave way following heavy rainfall. By. SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ.

Recent weeks have brought a remarkable shift in weather conditions across the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Following a period of concerning dryness earlier in the

year, both territories are now free of drought—and in many areas, contending with the opposite problem: excessive rainfall.

According to the latest data from the U.S. Drought Monitor as of May 6, 2025, neither Puerto Rico nor the U.S. Virgin Islands is experiencing drought or abnormal dryness. A surge in rainfall during the early wet season has saturated soils, replenished reservoirs, and eased earlier concerns about fire risk and vegetation stress. In Puerto Rico, some mountainous regions received more than 20 inches of rain in just 16 days. Meanwhile, on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John, widespread rain has improved groundwater levels and restored vegetation.

However, this wet period has come with complications. Farmers across both territories report flooding, road erosion, delayed planting schedules, and increases in pests and weeds.

U.S. Virgin Islands: Wet Soils, Full Ponds, and Ongoing Recovery

Across the U.S. Virgin Islands, the wet season has brought visible improvements in soil and vegetation health. Farmers in St. Thomas say ponds are full and earlier signs of drought have faded. Livestock farmers also report better feed conditions, although road erosion from rains remains a concern, particularly in areas where compacted soil from previous drought years gave way under the weight of new storms.

On St. John, row and specialty crop farmers are responding to intermittent heavy rains and high winds. Despite these challenges, they say vegetation is recovering and many are preparing land for specialty crops, microgreens, and fruit trees. Crop rotation plans are also underway for the hotter summer months.

In St. Croix, farmers are relieved by consistent rainfall but are also dealing with erosion, flooding, and soil loss. Livestock farmers, in particular, are navigating muddy conditions and preparing for potential feed shortages later in the season when summer dryness may reduce grass availability.

Puerto Rico: Rainfall Brings Relief and Disruption

Puerto Rico has seen above-normal rainfall almost across the board, except in parts of Aguadilla and Isabela in the northwest and the southernmost coast, where groundwater has not fully recovered. Soil saturation has made agricultural work difficult, with frequent interruptions in planting, fertilizing, and general farm access.

In the central interior, towns like Caguas, Barranquitas, and Naranjito saw such persistent rainfall that pests and weeds flourished, increasing management costs. Agrotourism operations also suffered due to muddy, impassable terrain.

The northern towns of Barceloneta and Florida experienced flooding severe enough to revive dormant streams. One Barceloneta farmer reported a more productive cacao harvest despite fungal concerns caused by excessive moisture.

In the northeast, areas such as Canóvanas and Fajardo went from slightly dry to drenched, leading to small landslides and erosion. Mud and slippery slopes have made it difficult to reach farms, and agrotourism activities were also negatively affected.

The southeastern municipality of Yabucoa is grappling with unusually wet conditions for the season. Sandy soils have eroded, and routine farm operations have been delayed by unstable weather patterns alternating between heavy rains and dry days.

Farmers in Coamo and Yauco in the south reported that early rains have increased weed and pest problems. The moisture made working the land difficult and costly. One coffee grower in Yauco said the wet conditions caused a snail infestation in his nursery.

In the southwest, especially Guánica and Lajas, rains arrived earlier than usual. While the moisture disrupted fertilization and planting plans, farmers say it marks a significant change from the typically dry conditions of recent years.

The western municipalities of Las Marías, San Sebastián, and Lares recorded unusually wet weather in April and early May, with reports of erosion, fungal diseases like sigatoka, and temporary stream overflows. Farmers there say the rainfall has forced them to alter seasonal plans, especially for liming and fertilization.

Even the islands of Vieques and Culebra, which showed early drought signs in March, are now wet. Two wildfires remain active in Vieques, but overall, rain has reversed the worst signs of drought—though unevenly. Culebra received more rain than Vieques, where stream overflows and coastal erosion have been observed due to runoff.

Streamflow and Vegetation Look Healthy, But Pockets of Stress Remain

River and streamflow conditions across Puerto Rico are generally normal to high, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, with some overflow reported in the island's interior and northern regions. Soil moisture remains high, especially in central and western Puerto Rico, although dry pockets persist in parts of Aguadilla, Isabela, and the southern coast.

Vegetation health maps show mostly green conditions across the region, but isolated areas in northwestern Puerto Rico still show signs of stress. These areas may experience reduced crop and pasture productivity despite the broader trend of healthy growth.

Summer Outlook: Warm, but Not Drought-Prone

Looking ahead, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center forecasts near-normal precipitation through the summer in Puerto Rico, with the U.S. Virgin Islands expected to see slightly above-normal rainfall. Temperatures across both territories are projected to remain above normal between June and August 2025.

No drought is anticipated to develop in the upcoming three months, according to NOAA's Seasonal Drought Outlook.

This report is based on conditions as of May 6, 2025, and compiled by experts from multiple agencies including NOAA's National Weather Service, the USDA Caribbean Climate Hub, the University of the Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Geological Survey, among others.

For detailed groundwater data, wildfire activity, and river conditions, residents are encouraged to consult:

- [Drought.gov](https://drought.gov)
- USGS Virgin Islands Water Conditions
- [USDA Caribbean Climate Hub](#)

Farmers and producers are also encouraged to report impacts using the CMOR (Condition Monitoring Observations and Reports) tool or by joining the USDA Caribbean Climate Hub WhatsApp group.