

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Abattoir Shutdown Leaves Farmers Turning to “Bush Kills”, Raising Food Safety Concerns

With livestock transport to St. Croix halted and no functioning abattoir on St. Thomas, farmers are resorting to unsanitary “bush kills.” Lawmakers raise alarm over food safety risks as VIDA seeks to rehabilitate the island’s only slaughter facility.

Senate / **Published On August 16, 2025 06:25 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **August 16, 2025**



The prolonged closure of the V.I. Department of Agriculture's (VIDA) abattoir on St. Thomas has left farmers on St. Thomas and St. John without a reliable option for livestock slaughter, forcing some to resort to less than favorable methods as the department struggles to restore services.

For months, livestock had been shipped to St. Croix for processing, but that stopgap measure has ended. VIDA Commissioner Louis Petersen told lawmakers during Friday's Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance hearing that transporting animals between islands is no longer feasible. "We are unable to provide that service since no marine vessels are traveling a direct route from St. Thomas to St. Croix," he explained, though he added that inter-island transport may resume "by late August to early September."

The department has no funding to construct a new abattoir on St. Thomas, but Petersen confirmed that VIDA is working with the Department of Public Works to rehabilitate the existing facility. Just over half a million dollars in insurance proceeds will be used for the refurbishment. Bids for the project are expected to be solicited soon.

The update raised alarm among senators. Committee chair Senator Novelle Francis questioned whether residents of St. Thomas and St. John are now consuming only imported meat. He also suggested that local farmers may be resorting to "taking these matters into their own hands" with so-called "bush kills." Petersen acknowledged this, admitting, "Unfortunately, the meats that are consumed and produced locally have been slaughtered elsewhere, but not in a sanitary abattoir facility."

Francis described the revelation as "very concerning," warning, "We don't know what we're consuming in that instance." Senator Marvin Blyden echoed those concerns, stating, "Folks are killing animals every day... People can get sick as a result of that."

With the abattoir still offline, VIDA's leadership is moving forward with rehabilitation plans. Francis pledged to follow up with Petersen to explore how the Legislature can provide support to speed up the process.