

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Dairies To Make Comeback In 2015, St. Croix Senator Says

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Remember Island Dairies? Of course you do, especially if you've lived on St. Croix for some time. The company was shuttered on December 15th, 2011, citing skyrocketing operating costs along with lower sales as the cause, but if St. Croix Senator Sammuel Sanes has his way, Island Dairies will be reopened in 2015.

That's what Sanes told me on Saturday in an interview on my show, the Virgin Islands Political Consortium on 102.1 FM Life Radio, revealing that the reopening of the company was one of two major projects he hopes to see come to fruition next year.

"We are looking at the development of Island Dairies," Sanes said when asked what would he to do to revitalize St. Croix's lagging economy. The Senator had previously mentioned other efforts such as the new CruzJET PAC and Workation (Work Vacation) Incentive Program that seeks to add a new lease of life in St. Croix's tourism product by making available greatly discounted flights to tourists looking to visit the Island from the Northeast region of the U.S. The alliance already has participating partners such as Bohlke Airways, Miami Air and PublicCharter.com.

"We are looking into securing government funds and combining that with the private sector to bring back Islands Dairies," he continued. "It's viable, it's a plan that I've been working on for a while, myself and a gentleman by the name of Anthony Weeks and a couple of others, so that's one of the projects that we need to bring back."

I wanted specifics, so I asked the Senator how far along was the project: "Right now it's in the drafting stage and we've been gathering information," he said. "We have some stuff in the legal council office, so hopefully we're going to bring that to reality pretty soon."

I then asked when should the people of the Virgin Islands expect to see Island Dairies back in business.

"I am looking for 2015," the Senator said confidently. "This is one viable industry that we need to bring back. That combined with the Agriculture and Livestock Act."

According to Sanes, the Agriculture and Livestock Act (legislation seeking to give individuals who have livestock much-needed relief from high insurance premiums), work hand-in-hand. He said one of the reasons why there were no longer farmers who raise livestock is because the premiums were unfair, and gave an example of a cow crashing

into a vehicle, which then causes the farmers' insurance premiums to drastically escalate, forcing them to quit the business.

Island Dairies began operations in 1959. By 1981, St. Croix Dairy Products, a group of local investors, took over the company, David Schuster, the company's former CEO said.

"We wanted to be responsible to our employees and to see that they got their severance pay and their benefits," he added. "We wanted to exit in a businesslike manner."

The company had done well up until 2001, Schuster revealed, but the economic climate started to change, which lead to the unfortunate conclusion in 2011.

There were many calls for the government to help the company stay afloat, but although rumors claimed that some form of relief would be made available to help the company, it never materialized.