

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Meat Sales Will Continue Uninterrupted, DOA Assures

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Commissioner of Agriculture Louis Petersen Jr. said on Thursday that meat sales in the Virgin Islands would continue uninterrupted.

Petersen Jr. said that the abattoir department was making sure that its 40-year old machines were in good condition in time for federal inspection by the regional U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Food Safety Inspection Service, happening this month.

The commissioner had previously testified at a senate hearing that the DOA's abattoir division could be shut down for non-compliance.

"Technically, our abattoir plant can be shut down for non-compliance," Petersen said at the hearing Last Friday. "However we cannot afford such a closure since by law, all meat sold or used for commercial purposes in the territory must be slaughtered or processed in our federally inspected plants."

Since last Friday's hearings however, Petersen said that the Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Governor have been developing a comprehensive plan to remedy the problems facing the abattoir division, most of which stems from structural deficiencies like plumbing, lighting, ceiling weaknesses and equipment upgrades.

"The noted structural deficiencies of the abattoir plants on St. Thomas and St. Croix are due to the age of the slaughter houses. Despite their more than 40 years of operation, these facilities have never been closed and we remain committed to serving our farming clientele," Petersen concluded.

The Department of Agriculture last Friday requested a budget of \$2,450,613 for fiscal year 2015. 21 percent of the budget is allocated to the abattoir division, which represents the second largest recommended expenditure, falling just under administration.

DOA has overtime lost indelible staff positions and has not been able to fill them. Petersen also revealed that many of his already overworked staff had to perform triple duties to keep the department running, including his supervisors and directors.