

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Water Conservation Project Receives National Excellence Award, \$15,000 Research Prize

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The University of the Virgin Islands is one of 19 land-grant universities to receive the 2014 Experiment Station Section Excellence in Multistate Research Award.

In addition to having the UVI project name, "Scaling Micro Irrigation Technologies to Address the Global Water Challenge," added to a plaque at the USDA Waterfront Centre in Washington, D.C., the UVI researchers participating in the W-2128 Micro-irrigation for Sustainable Water Use project will receive \$15,000 to continue their work.

The prestigious award recognizes the university's collaboration on a multi-state research project that helps to increase farmers' understanding and use of micro-irrigation (MI)

systems to water their land, especially during droughts and water shortages. The project was selected out of more than 300 and the group was honored during an awards ceremony held at the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities annual meeting in Orlando.

Unlike conventional irrigation systems that "apply high volumes of water over wide areas [and] can lose a lot of water through runoff, leaching, or evaporation," according to UVI officials, "MI systems use special timers, sensors, and a network of narrow tubes to deliver the right amount of water at the right time."

"Our focus is to automate soil moisture monitoring and control irrigation," said Dr. Rhuanito Soranz Ferrarezi, UVI research assistant professor, horticulture and aquaculture. "We are measuring the water available to plants, and irrigating based on plant demand to reduce the amount of water and fertilizer applied and the pumping costs."

Dr. Ferrarezi, who recently joined UVI to head the project, said the project offers many benefits to farmers, including improved water productivity and quality, as well as improved crop production and profitability.

"The Multi-state Research Program is one of the best kept secrets of the land-grant university system," said H. Michael Harrington, executive director of the Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors. "This award recognizes outstanding interdependent efforts of researchers and extension specialists that have come together to tackle a priority issue that no one institution can address on their own."

UVI's project is located at the Agricultural Experimental Station on St Croix.