

The Virgin Islands Consortium

2015 Is The Year Of Island Dairies, Senator Sanes Says; Calls On GERS To Invest

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Is this the year of Island Dairies' return to St. Croix? Veteran Senator Sammuel Sanes says it is. He says he has been advocating and working behind the scenes to resurrect the once dominant dairy-producing company located in Sion Farm, St. Croix.

During the 2014 campaign season, Sanes told *VI Consortium* that he and others were working to give the shuttered company a new lease on life.

"We are looking into securing government funds and combining that with the private sector to bring back Islands Dairies," he said. "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. That's one of the projects that we need to bring back."

Speaking to Sanes on Sunday, the lawmaker remained resolute as *VI Consortium* reminded him of his proclamation during the heat of the 2014 election season. The only change in language this time was his preference that the company be locally owned.

"This is the deal. We've had several offers -- several individuals that are interested in it -- so I am revisiting it. I do think that this will be the year for somebody to invest in [Island Dairies] and bring it back," Sanes said.

He continued: "My thing is this, I would love to have somebody local to revisit it. So we are looking into it -- and who knows, I'm going to throw this at you. You know how GERS loves to invest? Why not Island Dairies? Invest in your own. I think it's a win-win situation. So that's one of the things that I'm going to [push for] -- Islands Dairies having investors coming from the Virgin Islands."

Sanes said the offers to invest in Islands Dairies have come from two sources: one local and the other off island. He did not specify where. The senator also revealed that some investors were waiting to see how the Mapp administration takes hold before jumping in the fray.

"One of the issues that we have right now is people are holding back because they want to see how this government is going to settle in," Sanes said. "And of course, they're business people -- that's understandable. So I'm just waiting right now, let the new government settle in, and then we can talk business."

When asked about the condition of the facility, Sanes said it's "an excellent facility." However, the senator admitted he hadn't been there since the beginning of 2014.

"Overall, speaking to the individuals that have been there, it is a good facility. It's an excellent facility, so it's just a matter of having somebody come in, invest in upgrading it a little, and then bring it back to production," he explained.

Island Dairies began operations in St. Croix 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 said. "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 led to the company's closing 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, it never materialized.

However, Sanes reiterated his belief that this will be the year the company returns to St. Croix.

"I'm really pushing for [the reopening of Islands Dairies] in 2015 because I do think that it's something that needs to come back," he said. "Not only is it beneficial for us from a health point of view, but you know what, Island Dairies is us, so we need to have it open."

Hopefully this year will be the year."

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