

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Seeking Federal Funds To Provide Drought Relief To Territory's Farmers

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Ernice Gilbert **August 08, 2015**



ST. CROIX -- Recognizing the immediate need for drought assistance for the territory's farmers, whose livestock have been dying almost daily as the heat continues to plague farms, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has said via a press release issued late Friday that she's currently petitioning the federal government for financial aid.

"I am deeply concerned about the impact the recent drought conditions is having in our community," Plaskett said. "My office has been in contact with Farm Service Agency (FSA) representatives for the Florida and Virgin Islands region and we are actively working to identify sources of relief for our local farmers and producers. We want our farmers to know that the district representative for the Florida/Virgin Islands region will be

traveling to the territory early next week to work on relief efforts with local stakeholders."

Farmers have been expressing the need for relief for months, and senators recently [passed a measure](#) that would provide some \$500,000 in drought relief through the Department of Agriculture. There's also a petition [being circulated](#) calling on the Mapp administration and other leaders to take swift action.

Dale Browne, co-founder of Sejah Farm, [who's been featured in an article](#) on *The Consortium*, has taken the step of asking the community for financial assistance; a sign of how dire state of affairs are.

"Since we recognized in April 2015 that there was less rainfall to maintain our pastures we began to cull our goats and sheep to meet the ongoing condition. Again in June 2015 we realized that there was still no change in rainfall, we continue culling. July has come and gone this drought has become a disaster (a farmer's nightmare). We are at a point now where crops and livestock are at greater risk. August projection of rain is not promising and the "hurry come" September does not promise any," reads a post on [Sejah Farm's website](#) calling for aid. The contributions, according to the post, "will be used to defray the cost of grain, water and other resources for our livestock (sheep and goats) and crop production."

Delegate Plaskett said once FSA representatives arrive in the territory, they will meet with local farmers to "discuss plans to advance the recommendation of a disaster declaration to the state level."

She added: "In the interim, the FSA is also working on including the Virgin Islands in the U.S. Drought Monitor Map, which provides a summary of drought conditions across the United States and Puerto Rico. This data helps with making drought relief decisions. My office has also been in contact with Agriculture Commissioner, Carlos Robles and local farmers to get a better understanding of the impact of the drought so that we can determine what emergency relief the territory is eligible for."

Feature Image: Goats and Sheep at Sejah Farms. This photo was captured during an April interview with the farm's co-founder, Dale Brown.