

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Drought Wiping Out Livestock Of Some Local Farmers; Mapp Considers Emergency Declaration

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ST. CROIX -- The Agriculture Industry in the Virgin Islands has its biggest market here, and as a result, the drought that's been affecting the territory -- and to a wider extent the Caribbean -- has left many of the island's farmers in utter devastation, some losing most their herd as rain continues to evade the territory.

Dale Brown, co-founder of Sejah Farm, spoke with *The Consortium* on Sunday about the wreckage the drought has wreaked. While Brown hasn't lost any of his animals because of strategic planning, he said the farmers to the south of his farm, located on Casper Holstein Drive, have been hit so hard that it will take time for them to recover.

"One of the farmers down the road spends about \$200 to \$300 a month for feed that his bringing in from Puerto Rico, and that was before the drought got this bad," Brown said.

Images of dead livestock on various farms on the island have been made available to *The Consortium*, as advocates of drought relief work to expose the urgent nature of the situation. One farm, according to advocates, lost four cows in one week.

But help has been coming through various avenues as farmers have sought and received agriculture industry alive.



Sejah Farm co-founder Yvette Browne feed

milk to a ewe.

Sejah Farm, for example, has created a drought relief webpage on its [website](#) through which individuals could donate, an effort Browne said was initiated to prevent his operation from seeing the same fate as the neighboring farms.

"We have pregnant and lactating ewes and does who require more nutrition to maintain them during their pregnancy and nursing their lambs and kids. We have also halted all breeding of our livestock, because this will add more stress to the herd survival," reads the post.

"At this point all that remain in the pastures are dry matter and rock that is not most adequate to maintain the herds' nutrition. Neighboring farms has lost a significant amount of cattle, sheep and goats due to this drought, and now we are at a stage could reach this same fate."

At the [31st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference](#) being held at the Buccaneer Hotel from August 9-14, Governor Kenneth Mapp sought to ensure farmers that his administration remains well aware of the current situation, and that while they've been taking steps toward providing relief, a drought declaration would only be announced after a thorough discussion of what it would mean had been held.

The governor said his administration would meet with federal officials on Monday "in considerations of the conditions that exist today, to make sure we understand what a declaration of emergency should provide."

Mapp said he will not sign a state of emergency "just to sign one." He wants to know "how should it be properly constructed, what would be the resources and the assets provided to our farmers in the territory even beyond just loans from the federal government in terms of low interest, because some of our farmers may not be able to

support loans," said the territory's leader.

The governor mentioned a [measure approved](#) by members of the 31st Legislature that makes available immediate relief of \$500,000 to farmers through the Dept. of Agriculture, an amendment sponsored by Senator Janette Millin Young which Mapp said he will approve.

He also announced that his administration would soon be forwarding a bill to the Senate that creates an agriculture revolving fund, "to ensure a minimum of \$1 million to the Department of Agriculture for support services." The governor said language in the legislation will demand that not more than \$100,000 will be used for administration, a move he hopes will see the bulk of the funds being expended on the needs of the territory's farmers in regards to equipment, water baffles, "and can provide feed and stock to begin this process that the administration is committed to doing called Farm-to-Table in our school lunch program."