

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Declared Drought Disaster Area By USDA, Emergency Loans Now Available

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ST. CROIX -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has designated this island a as "primary natural disaster" area due to damages and losses caused by the drought that began affecting the territory from April 1, 2015, according to a [press release](#) the agency issued on Wednesday. The designation comes as tropical storm Erika arrives in the territory on Thursday morning.

"Our hearts go out to farmers and ranchers affected by this recent natural disaster in St. Croix County in the U.S. Virgin Islands," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

"President Obama and I are committed to ensuring that agriculture remains a bright spot in our nation's economy by sustaining the successes of America's farmers, ranchers, and

rural communities through these difficult times. We're also telling producers in St. Croix County that USDA stands with you and your communities when severe weather and natural disasters threaten to disrupt your livelihood."

On August 12, Carlos Robles, commissioner of the Department of Agriculture [met with](#) farmers, business owners and concerned citizens at UVI's Great to give an update on the drought situation and the government's progress in convincing the Secretary of Agriculture to declare the island a disaster area.

According to the release, the island was designated a natural disaster area on Aug. 26, 2015, making all qualified farm operators here eligible for low interest emergency (EM) loans from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met. Farmers have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for loans to help cover part of their actual losses. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. FSA has a variety of programs, in addition to the EM loan program, to help eligible farmers recover from adversity.

Additional programs available to assist farmers and ranchers include the Emergency Conservation Program, the Livestock Forage Disaster Program, the Livestock Indemnity Program, the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program, and the Tree Assistance Program, the release further stated.

Interested farmers may contact their local USDA Service Centers for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures for these and other programs. Additional information is also available [here](#).