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## Nonprofit Announces its First Round of Grants to Support Sustainable Farming and Fishing in USVI

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World Central Kitchen (WCK) has announced its first round of grant awards in the U.S. Virgin Islands through Plow to Plate, the organization's food security and resilience program that offers direct financial support to small farmers, fishers, and agribusinesses.

According to the release, in the short term, the grants awarded will help food-related small businesses, who saw their operations paralyzed by Hurricanes Irma and María, to revitalize and regenerate their long-term capacity for the production, distribution, and sale of food. In the long-term, Plow to Plate aims to decrease the high rate of food imports in the USVI by supporting local food production.

The first round of Plow to Plate grantees include: My Neighbor's Garden, New Breed Farm, Ridge to Reef Farm, Sejah Farm of the Virgin Islands, St. George Village Botanical Garden, Tropics Hydroponics Farm, and the fisher Julian Magras.

Grants are used to fund extraordinary capital investments, such as tractors, ice-machines, walk-in freezers, irrigation systems, boat engines, and heavy equipment. WCK also offers access to training in technical areas to improve the grantees production and business skills to increase sales and access to diverse markets, and as soon as social distancing safety measures permit, the non-profit organization will launch a volunteer program where locals and visitors alike may contribute community service hours on partner farms, the release said.

"It's been almost two years since Hurricanes Irma and María devastated farm and fishing operations in the USVI and we're still seeing such great need, but most importantly such resilience, determination, and perseverance on behalf of local food producers. Our goal is to help them build back better and smarter, in an effort to increase local food that nourishes households with fresh products and contributes to reducing food insecurity," said Mikol Hoffman, WCK's director of Plow to Plate.

WCK's Plow to Plate program was established in 2018 in response to the 2017 hurricanes and has since then awarded almost \$2 million in grants to food producers affected by natural disasters. In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program virtually expanded to the USVI and The Bahamas in their continued efforts to support food security in the Caribbean, the release said. To date, Plow to Plate has provided over 3,300 hours of capacity building and networking, as well as connected over 800 volunteers to work on partner farms. WCK is the same organization that served nearly 24,601 meals along with My Brother's Workshop in St. Thomas and St. Croix, and with the Gift Hill School in St. John in response to COVID-19.

Plow to Plate plans to open calls for applications to the program every six months, with the next application round opening in September 2020.