

The Virgin Islands Consortium

There Are No Operational Abattoirs In The USVI

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Ernice Gilbert **March 20, 2019**



Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Nominee, Positive Nelson, during a press conference on Tuesday spoke forcefully against what he called "bush kill", a term used in the territory for individuals who slaughter their livestock on their own. Mr. Nelson said the practice was illegal and could lead to food contamination, and called on those engaged in the practice -- unless it's for personal use -- to immediately cease. The former senator said the proper way of handling the slaughtering of animals is to bring livestock to the Department of Agriculture's abattoir, where trained professionals can safely kill the animals, which can then be sold to the public.

But while Mr. Nelson advocated using the territory's abattoirs, as of Tuesday, none were operational -- not St. Croix's or St. Thomas's, and the commissioner nominee could not

say when either would be back up.

On St. Croix, Mr. Nelson blamed the abattoir's current down status on the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, and he could not give a timeline as to when the authority would rectify the problem. He said rusted water was running through the abattoir's pipes, making for unsanitary conditions. On St. Thomas, the situation was even worse, with the commissioner nominee stating that Hurricanes Irma and Maria had badly damaged the facility, and that a lot of work was needed there before the abattoir could be operational again.

Relative to the St. Croix operation, Mr. Nelson said his team was searching for solutions within the department, including the possible use of cistern water, as a solution. But "that's going to take some work because the cistern has water in that's been sitting for a while so that also cannot be used," he said.

Mr. Nelson said he would work with abattoir employees to see what alternate plans the department could come up with, but as of late Tuesday, none was offered. "That's all we can do, work within our means," Mr. Nelson said. "I'm not trying to pitch you any throw-around here, I'm just being very direct and real with you, it is what it is. It's not a situation we welcome, but these are the situations that we find ourselves in.

"Could we go back and blame administration after administration for not investing in agriculture's infrastructure? Sure, but who's that going to benefit at this point? So my type of leadership is looking forward, looking at the positives, pun intended, and seeing how we could best improve our situation here and our service to the people of the territory," Mr. Nelson said.

A Department of Agriculture employee advised livestock owners during the press conference to continue feeding their animals, and whenever the abattoir was up and running again, the animals would be slaughtered. "Ain't nothing going to happen to them," the employee offered, referring to the livestock. "Just continue to feed them and give them water, that's all."

Abattoir problems in the territory are nothing new, and Mr. Nelson said some of the structural issues date back years and should have been addressed long ago. The abattoirs have also been cited by federal regulators for inhumane slaughtering of bovine (bulls and cows), which resulted in a [months-long suspension on the St. Croix facility in 2017](#).