

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USDA, Local Partners to Conduct Census of Agriculture in U. S. Virgin Islands

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), with assistance from the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture and the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service (CES) is collecting Census of Agriculture data from all known farmers this summer, UVI made known Wednesday.

The census of Agriculture provides the most widely used statistics in the agriculture industry, the release said. Typically conducted every five years, it was last collected in the USVI more than 10 years ago due to budget constraints. It is the leading source of statistics about the USVI's agricultural production and the only source of comprehensive, comparable data at the island level. Among other things, the data can be used by local

agencies and organizations to provide more effective production and distribution systems for the agricultural community. One of the most important uses of census data is to justify claims of farmers who may suffer damages and losses due to natural disasters, such as hurricanes.

"Census data are used to make important local and national decisions that affect U.S. Virgin Islands farmers and their communities," said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. "We need to hear from all of our farmers in order to provide the most accurate, most helpful information about agriculture in the islands."

According to the release, starting this summer, a local representative will visit each farm to assist in the collection of these vital data. For this effort, a farm is defined as all places from which \$500 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, in 2018. For this census, USDA revised the questions to capture changes and emerging trends in the industry. The questionnaire includes a new section on agricultural practices, questions on an expanded list of commodities, and a section about government agricultural programs.

The USVI is included in the census program in accordance with an agreement between NASS and the commissioner of Agriculture of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Participating in the census is required by federal law under Title 7 USC 2204(g) Public Law 105- 113. The same law requires USDA to keep all information confidential, to use the data only for statistical purposes, and to publish data only in aggregate form to prevent disclosing the identity of any individual producer or farm operation. USDA will release census results in summer 2020.