

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Program Aimed at Helping USVI Farmers Apply For USDA NRCS Funding Launched by V.I. Good Food Coalition

Community Center / **Published On December 06, 2022 07:37 AM /**

Staff Consortium **December 06, 2022**



The Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition announced Monday its new farmer-support program called Resources for Resilient Farms, with national partner Rural Advancement Foundation International USA (RAFI-USA). The program aims to assist farmers with applying for U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service funding.

To that end, V.I. farmers and producers are being invited to attend the program's launch event on Tuesday, December 13 from 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. at the University of the Virgin Islands' Research & Technology Park on the St. Croix campus.

According to the release, the event will conclude with a small party to celebrate the V.I. Good Food Coalition's 10th anniversary.

RSVP is required, and participants are asked to email event attendance confirmation to info@goodfoodvi.org, or text to 340-643-4831.

The V.I. Good Food Coalition said it will be hosting a similar event in St. Thomas in early 2023 for St. Thomas and St. John farmers.

Every year millions of dollars are available to farmers nationwide through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). However, the programs are not being accessed equitably by underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers across the U.S., the V.I. Good Food Coalition said in its release.

"Here in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a very small portion of farmers receive funding through the program," the organization said.

The V.I. Good Food Coalition and RAFI-USA's new Resources for Resilient Farms program aims to increase program participation and retention rates by providing direct support through technical services. The coalition's outreach and technical assistance team will set up appointments with farmers on St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John to assist with filling out required paperwork and applications, appointments with USDA NRCS agents, and meeting program deadlines, stated the release.

"In many instances, the barriers that V.I. farmers face in successfully completing the NRCS paperwork and receiving funding are having sufficient time, easy access to support, and understanding of the process," said Sommer Sibilly-Brown, executive director of V.I. Good Food Coalition. "The Resource for Resilient Farmers program allows us to serve as a bridge between NRCS and farmers and provide direct one-on-one assistance with the application process to ensure that more farmers, land owners and agro-business owners are accessing the funding resources available to leverage growth in their agro-businesses and help protect and conserve our islands' limited natural resources."

Nationally and here in the U.S. Virgin Islands, USDA NRCS programs provide farmers with free consultations from local NRCS agents to assess the health and conservation needs of their land as it relates to six areas of focus: forestry, wildlife, energy, air, soil and water, the coalition said.

Eligible farmers and landowners can apply for NRCS funding which provides 50-90 percent cost share for land and farm improvement projects, such as water catchment and irrigation, pond development, fencing for livestock, cover crops, and more.

The Resources for Resilient Farmers program is a two-year collaboration led by RAFI-USA and partners to assist small-scale, BIPOC farmers through the NRCS application process and conservation action plan preparation. The program aims to introduce approximately 1,500 Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers to NRCS technical and financial assistance programs throughout the Southeastern U.S. states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“We are pleased to be a part of this important project which centers historically underserved farmers and climate-smart agriculture,” stated Edna Rodriguez, executive director of RAFI-USA. “This project allows us to continue focusing on serving members of our Farmers of Color Network based in the Southeast U.S. and launch our planned expansion of programs to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. We are especially excited to be working in partnership with the Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition.”

The December 13th program launch event will provide further details about USDA NRCS funding programs and the steps involved from determining eligibility to reporting on project completion, and how V.I. Good Food Coalition will assist farmers with each step, according to the release.

USDA NRCS representatives will be available at the Tuesday evening event to answer questions about the specific funding parameters and details about conservation project qualifications.