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# Farmers Severely Impacted as St. Croix Experiences 'Extreme' Drought; Agriculture Commissioner Says Free Water Not Sustainable

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Drought on St. Croix is a growing concern for farmers on the island and for the V.I. Department of Agriculture, according to department officials, D.O.A. Commissioner Positive Nelson said during a St. Croix Coastal Zone Management (CZM) committee meeting Tuesday evening.

To mitigate against the negative impacts of the current drought, classed as extreme, Mr. Nelson said the department is working on projects aimed at increasing water storage capacity, though he warned that the current model that sees the department providing water free of charge to farmers is unsustainable.

Speaking at the St. Croix Coastal Zone Management (CZM) committee meeting on Tuesday evening, Mr. Nelson said that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources would be spearheading upcoming plans to deepen and expand several ponds in a bid to improve water catchment, including one that sits on Department of Agriculture property.

In the face of farmers' expressed concerns about securing sufficient water, Mr. Nelson, who Governor Bryan has said [will soon be given another role in government](#), told CZM Committee members that there had been numerous challenges in that regard, ranging from "having limited storage on site," to "certain wells...not having the same underground water capacity."

St. Croix is particularly hard hit, Mr. Nelson noted. Drought levels on St. Thomas were assessed as D1, the least intense, while St. Croix was suffering from D3 levels of drought, the second most intense classification on the U.S. drought classification scale.

Some farmers have dug wells of their own in an attempt to access sufficient water to sustain their livelihoods, but those wells have been less productive than expected, so farmers are still pumping from Department of Agriculture wells, Mr. Nelson made known.

Farmers have access to water free of charge from the department, and the D.O.A.'s water truck is still making deliveries. However, Mr. Nelson warned that maintaining a continuous free supply of water for irrigation was just not feasible.

"The department cannot meet everybody's water needs...that's somewhat of an interest that they have to also manage and help to facilitate on their own to some degree," he noted gravely.

"Water is not free... we provide it [for] free and that's not sustainable."

The commissioner suggested that water in the community gardens be metered so that some measure of discipline and accountability could be imposed on the farmers utilizing the resource. That way, he said, some measure of discipline can be instilled in the farmers utilizing them.