

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI to be Included in National Drought Outlooks, Congresswoman Plaskett Announces

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has announced that the U.S. Virgin Islands will be incorporated into the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) Operational Drought Outlooks from August 2023. These reports, provided by the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), offer a detailed forecast of potential drought conditions on both a monthly and seasonal basis.

Ms. Plaskett expressed her satisfaction with the decision, stating that the inclusion of the Virgin Islands in the U.S. Drought Monitor in 2019, following her office's successful collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has been instrumental in providing general summaries of current drought conditions and enabling access to permanent

disaster relief programs related to drought.

"This new inclusion in the CPC Drought Outlooks will provide our farmers with additional resources to assist their planning and preparation for adverse conditions, as well as to maximize expected favorable conditions," Ms. Plaskett said.

The decision to include the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Operational Drought Outlooks was the result of a community-wide effort. Various local entities, including the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency, environmental monitoring volunteers, the farming community, the University of the Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands Drought Coordinator, Christina Chanes, collaborated to collect, compile, and analyze data on precipitation and particulate matter.

The impact of weather on agriculture is immense, making accurate weather forecasts, like the CPC Drought Outlooks, an invaluable resource for farmers, Ms. Plaskett said. The data can help inform essential decision-making on matters such as the selection and quantity of crops to grow, irrigation practices, timing of planting and harvesting, and considerations around crop insurance.

The congresswoman stressed the importance of this development for the local agricultural community. "It is my hope that the data and resources provided by the Drought Outlooks will be a well-utilized resource by our local farmers and those in the Virgin Islands agriculture sector," Plaskett said.