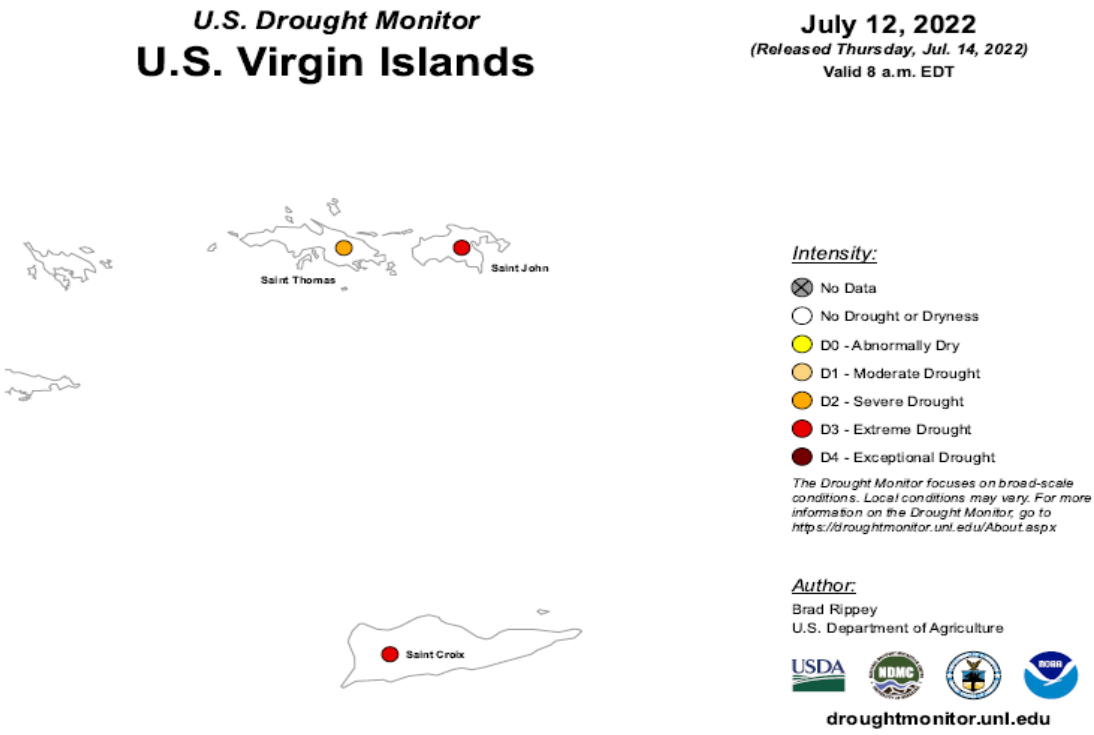
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News Release

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VIDA Recommends Conservation Methods as Drought Conditions Dominate Territory



USDA Map of the USVI detailing status of the drought in the territory

(St Thomas, USVI) – The US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture is alerting both the farming community and families that the territory is in a drought currently and are asking members of the community to please conserve water.

Currently the US Drought Monitors have listed the territory as severe. Both St John and St Croix are listed as a D3 (SL) which is both short and long term which means that there are major crop losses, widespread water shortages and vegetation is severely distressed. The USDM's also indicated that St Thomas is listed as D2 (SL) which means that water shortages are occurring and that there are crop and pasture losses.

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“We never really came out of the drought from last year, so we are really taking a hit when it comes to water use in ag across the territory,’ said Commissioner Positive Nelson, of VIDA. “Because of that, we are urging everyone who has farms as well as the public in general to be mindful of water use. We know home gardeners and small producers are also suffering so we want to remind everyone to save water.”

VIDA along with researchers from the University of the Virgin Islands are working with the Government of the USVI to ensure that drought conditions are monitored on a daily, weekly and monthly basis for further understanding of drought impacts across the territory.

UVI researchers coordinate with US Drought Monitors (USDM’s) to better understand drought in the region. USDM’s has indicated that St Croix which never came out of drought and is still showing signs of distressed vegetation. This means long-term conservation methods must be put in place territory wide.

Livestock farmer Allan Schuster of Cane Ridge Farms said that this year the drought has been harsh. “We’ve lost 10 animals so far this year and we are doing our best to rotate livestock so they can forage,” Schuster said. “We have tried to do a good job as far as our conversation management plan but from here it looks like the drought is harsher and lasting longer each year which impacting our business.”

The CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network) is a national grassroot organization of volunteers that collect high quality, real-time data on daily precipitation. Accurate rain data through this volunteer network is extremely important to measuring weather and climate conditions, interpreting climate change trends in the USVI, monitoring and understanding drought and for bringing together the community around citizen science, monitoring and data collection.



1Signs point to long-term drought in the USVI. This is a picture of Mary’s Point on St John taken by Rafe Boulon on 7.11.22

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As part of the USVI CoCoRaHS program, researchers have given out rain gauges to fifty volunteers including farmers to aid them in their efforts to collect data on farms across the region to help with monitoring water resources. Christina Chanes of UVI is the first ever VI Coordinator for CoCoRaHS and stated without the aid of the public, the ability to study water resources in the territory would be difficult. Chanes also indicated that documenting drought this year will aid everyone who collects water for use including homeowners and farmers alike who depend on it.

“We’re working very closely with the ag community and the USDM’s to better understand what is really going on with water in the territory,” she said adding that while many believe that the rain is warding off drought, it’s not raining as much as it normally does this time of year and is not having the impact needed to take the USVI out of drought status.

Water resources are of concern everywhere across America but in the USVI, it is vital as many here including homeowners and the farmers collect water for use and without a better understanding of what rain is or is not occurring in the region, it would be difficult to monitor conditions. When rainwater cannot be collected, there is a direct and real cost which has an economic impact to those paying for it.

“We know a lack of access to water has economic impacts,” said Nelson, “so we are encouraging everyone including those who rooftop collect to put in place a conservation method.”

For farmers who may have livestock, the Farm Service Agency will be providing funds to those who qualified in 2021 and 2022 where needed if the current drought levels meet the federal requirements. Farmers seeking such information can call, FSA at 340-773-9146 to learn more about the 2021-2022 Drought program. For those seeking to renew or become licensed or inquire about the farmland Tax Exemption with VIDA on St John call, 340-423-9022 or 340-725-5268 on St Croix and 340-774-5182 on St Thomas for more information.

To learn more about the CoCoRaHS program or to be considered as a host site for a rain a gauge to help monitor precipitation, please contact:

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