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Department of Agriculture

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Commissioner

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For Immediate Release

VI Department of Agriculture Declares a Phytosanitary Emergency
and Quarantine Measures Due to the Detection of the
Mediterranean Fruit Fly

[St. Croix, Virgin Islands] — The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture is alerting the Virgin Islands community of a state of emergency to the recent detection of the **Mediterranean Fruit Fly (Medfly)** on the island of St. Croix. Since March 2026 a growing number of male and female specimens have been identified in locations between the eastern end (Tamarind Reef) and mid-island (Princess) regions of St. Croix. The early detection of this pest was made possible thanks to the surveillance and monitoring system implemented in partnership with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

The Mediterranean Fruit Fly (*Ceratitis capitata*) is one of the most destructive agricultural pests in the world with significant economic impact due to its ability to infest more than 250 species of fruits and vegetables. The host range includes, but is not limited to, mangoes, guavas, avocados, soursop, sugar apple, breadfruit, genip, papaya, carambola, citrus, bananas, watermelon, peppers, and tomatoes – just to name a few. If left unchecked, infestations can cause significant crop damage, reduce food supply, and negatively impact local farmers and gardeners.

Based on the serious risks posed by this invasive species and effective immediately, the Virgin Islands Department has declared a phytosanitary emergency due to the detection of the **Mediterranean Fruit Fly** for the entire island of St. Croix. This emergency measure will take the form of an island-wide quarantine. Our agency is currently working with federal partners at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and the Virgin Island Territorial Emergency Management Agency to coordinate efforts in response to this emerging threat. Recognizing that the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is the federal agency authorized to direct regulatory actions related to pest quarantines, the VI Department of Agriculture has formally requested that USDA APHIS

activate the Incident Command System to coordinate the interagency response to this phytosanitary emergency.

Residents should anticipate the increased presence of local and federal personnel who will be implementing control and monitoring protocols throughout the island of St. Croix. These efforts include, but not be limited to, the strategic placement of an increased number of traps and enhanced inspections.

The Department of Agriculture is requesting the public's cooperation and assistance in protecting the local, regional and national agricultural sectors by adhering to the following:

- When returning from international travel, declare all agricultural products to U.S. customs officials.
- Be mindful that St. Croix is under quarantine. Do not move fresh fruits, vegetables or host plants off the island
- Cooperate with the surveillance team as necessary.

This emergency quarantine program, with the goal of containing and eradicating the pest before it becomes established in the USVI, will remain effective until further notice. For further information about the quarantine, please contact State Survey Coordinator Dornel Walters at dornel.walters@doa.vi.gov. Residents are also encouraged to visit our website at www.doa.vi.gov for updates regarding our monitoring and response efforts and to view a list of the host species of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly.

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