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The Power of Partnerships:

CFVI Teams up with American Red Cross to Award \$1 Million in Grants

Funds help Territory's farmers and most vulnerable populations

U.S. Virgin Islands, May 22, 2020 — The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) is pleased to announce that it has awarded more than \$1 million in grants supporting USVI farmers and social services clients across the Territory through a collaborative grant program funded by the American Red Cross (ARC).

Micro Grant Program for Farmers

Having renewed its presence in the Territory, the Red Cross was aware of the challenges facing the local agricultural sector following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. In an effort to provide services to help USVI farmers recover and build resilient systems of agriculture, ARC conceived the Micro Grant Program to assist livelihood recovery for small farmers with distinct unmet needs – specifically, the loss or damage to farm outbuildings, water tanks, and other support structures needed to operate a small farm. Ultimately, the program was designed meet some of the “gaps” in assistance from Federal and local government recovery programs.

The Micro Grant Program for farmers resulted in \$474,959 being awarded via grants to 104 local farmers/farms on St. Croix (\$293,516), St. Thomas (\$107,876), and St.

John (\$73,567). The grant program was designed specifically to provide farmers with the means to start, continue, or complete repairs to damaged structures and recover from other losses suffered as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Additional support of \$238,617.49 was provided to enable the VI Department of Agriculture to replace greenhouses damaged in the storms, and to propagate seedlings for community use.

A farmer on St. Thomas expressed their appreciation for the assistance, noting “I’m hoping one day that we as a farming community will be able to feed our neighbors with fresh fruits and vegetables. Hurricane Maria wiped out 72 fruit trees at my farm, but we are replanting and never giving up.”

To be eligible for the grant program, applicants were required to have a VI Department of Agriculture license to farm, file an annual IRS Schedule F, provide proof of land ownership or lease/tenancy agreement, and provide proof of loss. The application and review process was conducted by the ARC in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency, the VI Department of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of the Virgin Islands. Beginning in 2018, the program was advertised to solicit small farmers to apply to receive a one-time grant for the repair or replacement of their farm outbuildings, related structures, and fixtures (including new construction, repairs, and replacement of these essential structures and fixtures).

“CFVI’s grant making to farmers in the aftermath of the hurricanes of 2017 took place over the course of 18 months, including receipt and evaluation of applications, issuing checks, and then following up with a second round of grant-making,” said CFVI President, Dee Baecher-Brown. “We are so appreciative of the dedication and determination of USVI farmers who built themselves back after the storms and are now working to provide local solutions to the worldwide food supply concerns during this era of COVID-19. We are also so thankful to the American Red Cross for their vision in identifying this need and then providing this support in response to the extraordinary situation in the aftermath of the storms.”

“We at The American Red are very proud to be a part of the recovery from the 2017 storms and to have had the opportunity to serve the farming community as well as the vulnerable populations. The guidance and team work with CFVI made it possible to help and support the Territory in a very successful manner,” said John Duck, Executive Director of the American Red Cross. “We are now preparing for the 2020 hurricane season and how COVID-19 will affect what we do. Bottom line is The American Red Cross will be here in the U.S. Virgin Islands to serve as needed now and in the future.”

Rapid Response Block Grant Program for Vulnerable Populations

The Rapid Response Block Grant Program was designed to enhance the capacity of nonprofit partners to administer critical needs grants in a timely and efficient manner, with an emphasis on elderly, disabled, and other vulnerable populations particularly impacted by the 2017 hurricanes. Priority was given to applicants with one-time emergency needs, especially those needs that could not be met by other sources, such as FEMA or unemployment assistance.

CFVI provided block grants to four longtime Rapid Response Program partners: Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands, Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, Methodist Training Outreach Center, and Virgin Islands Partners for Healthy Communities. As a result, \$720,000 was distributed to over 450 individuals/families. Funds were used for critical expenses such as medical equipment, medications, rent/mortgage and utility bills, transportation costs, essential furniture/appliances, home repairs, and supplies. Grant funds combined with case management alleviated critical financial needs, enhanced self-sufficiency, and increased clients' sense of well-being. By providing capacity funding totaling \$80,000 across the agencies, CFVI also ensured that organizations had the tools/resources and personnel to complete this significant undertaking on a short timeline. CFVI took no fees from the ARC award, ensuring that 100% of the grant funds were distributed directly to support the nonprofits and their clients.

Partner agencies shared their appreciation for the funding, which augmented their standard case management assistance, allowing them to reach a greater number of clients and make a significant impact.

"ARC funding allowed us to restore hope and improve many living situations for low-income residents who were in despair or resigned to living in totally unsafe, unhealthy, insecure living conditions," said Karen Hunt, Program Director of Virgin Islands Partners for Healthy Communities. "Interaction with clients was an important opportunity to provide education on disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation as well. Clients expressed eternal gratitude for items funded by ARC which were unlikely to be met through any other currently available resource."

"CFVI is grateful for the extreme generosity of donors on our islands, the mainland U.S., and throughout the world," said Baecher-Brown. "Donations to CFVI have allowed us to fund organizations that are providing expanded services to the children, the homeless, elderly, and other vulnerable populations like our farmers. These donations enable support to organizations that provide essential services and other initiatives contributing to the well-being of the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands."

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About the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands

Since 1990, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) has been a catalyst for positive change in the Territory through initiatives committed to youth, learning, family support and the environment. With a professional staff and a volunteer Board of Directors composed of community leaders, CFVI is a trusted advocate and supporter of programs that ensure opportunity and sustainability for current and future generations. CFVI is a registered non-profit organization entirely supported by individual donors, grants, trusts, corporate donations and estate planning. For more information, visit cfvi.net.

About the American Red Cross and ARC U.S. Virgin Islands

As a community-based humanitarian organization, the American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors. We respond to emergencies and disasters across the region – home fires, floods, weather-related emergencies and more – providing shelter, food, clothing and emotional support at no cost to those in need. The U.S. Virgin Islands Chapter of the American Red Cross serves a population of over

106,000 residents in St. Croix, St. Thomas St. John, and Water Island, with offices in St. Croix and St. Thomas. For more information, visit redcross.org.