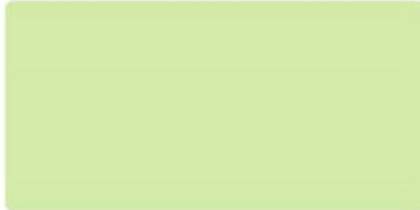
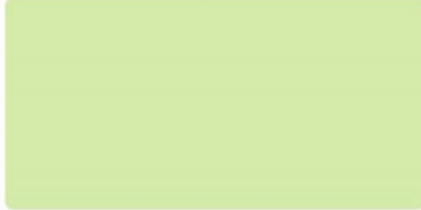




# LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Local Foods, Local Places

Community Action Plan  
for Coamo, Puerto Rico

April 2018



For more information about Local Foods, Local Places visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>

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## Community Story

The Municipality of Coamo is in the central southern region of Puerto Rico, just south of the Central Mountain Range. It consists of 78 square miles of varying topographies and elevations, with valleys, plains, and hill sides. The Municipality contains 11 towns, including Coamo Pueblo—its downtown, urban center. Downtown Coamo is one of the earliest Spanish colonial settlements on the island, founded in 1579, gaining recognition as an official town in 1616. Prior to Spanish colonization, the Tainos, an indigenous population, called Coamo home.



Figure 1 –Coamo’s Town Hall. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

As Coamo grew under Spanish leadership, the Taino population dwindled. Coamo eventually became the administrative center of the southern portion of the island though Ponce, a larger coastal city, took over this role in later years. However, Coamo retained recognition throughout the island as a popular tourist attraction due to nearby natural hot spring pools known for their medicinal attributes. In 1898, a critical battle took place in Coamo during the Spanish-American War.

Coamo’s economy is historically agricultural based, specifically in the production of sugarcane and tobacco. During the 1970’s, the economy transitioned to manufacturing, resulting in population growth and urbanization throughout the Municipality. With this shift, the island’s agriculture industry slowed, and Puerto Rico relied more on imported goods and produce from the mainland.

In the early 2000s, legislative changes affecting manufacturing resulted in companies leaving the island and an overall loss of jobs.<sup>1</sup> The island’s dependence on imported foods and produce resulted in higher costs of living for residents. Puerto



Figure 2 – View of the natural hot spring pools in Coamo. This is a main touristic attraction for Coamo as the springs are believed to contain medicinal attributes and benefits. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by community in Local Foods, Local Places application.

Rico's location on the Caribbean Sea adds to challenges, as the island is more susceptible to hurricanes and tropical storms, which threaten the island's remaining agriculture and its food security.

The overall job loss in the early 2000s continues to impact Coamo residents today. Present day Coamo is home to 40,512 residents; less than half of the population is actively participating in the labor force (40.3 percent).<sup>2</sup> The Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources estimates 15.2 percent of the Coamo labor force is unemployed and seeking work as of February 2018.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, estimates from the American Community Survey, indicate that Coamo's poverty rate (49.3 percent) is higher than the overall Puerto Rico poverty rate of 45 percent. When women are the head of household in Coamo, this statistic is even higher (a poverty rate of 58.6 percent).<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3— The Church of San Blas de Illescas located on the center plaza of Coamo. This one of the earliest constructions in Puerto Rico; its construction began in 1661. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

Coamo has continued its efforts in recovering from the economic downturn from the early 2000s. The Municipality has responded to these economic conditions by:

- Investing in municipal-owned businesses to create jobs in the area.
- Revitalizing its downtown to bring people back to the urban center.
- Developing strategies focused on local agriculture to increase residents' food access and security.

Then on September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a Category 4 hurricane. It caused catastrophic damage and numerous fatalities. The hurricane wiped out 80 percent of the island's crops, at an estimated loss of \$780 million to the agricultural industry. Additionally, the hurricane eradicated the island's power grid leaving millions without electricity for months and causing considerable damage to critical infrastructure. Damaged infrastructure contributed to the logistical difficulties of dispersing food, medical needs, and goods throughout the island.<sup>5</sup> This event was

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2010 Census." [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml). Accessed Apr. 11, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Puerto Rico Government, Department of Labor and Human Resources. "Información del Mercado Laboral Puerto Rico." [http://www.mercadolaboral.pr.gov/Construccion\\_Tablas/Fuerza\\_Trabajadora/Serie\\_Historica\\_Municipio.aspx](http://www.mercadolaboral.pr.gov/Construccion_Tablas/Fuerza_Trabajadora/Serie_Historica_Municipio.aspx). Accessed Apr. 11, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_DP03&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_DP03&prodType=table). Accessed Apr. 11, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Frances Robles and Luis Ferre-sadurni. "Puerto Rico's Agriculture and Farmers Decimated by Mari." *The New York Times*. Sep. 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/24/us/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-agriculture-.html>.



devastating, but it has reinforced the Municipality’s interest in increasing access to fresh foods and making local food part of the community’s economic and community development strategies.

Coamo staff and its consultants came together to form a Local Foods, Local Places steering committee in preparation for this technical assistance award (see Figure 4). Prior to the Local Foods, Local Places process, the steering committee members advanced other efforts in Coamo, including comprehensive community revitalization strategies in downtown, preservation efforts of historic buildings, and implementation of economic development strategies. They pursued grants to advance their local foods strategies (Farm-to-School grant), and received designation as Puerto Rico’s first livable community by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

In their request for the Local Foods, Local Places technical assistance, the steering committee identified establishing a farmers market and locating a community center in downtown as primary goals. The farmers market and community center would complement and contribute towards additional goals, like:

- Increasing residents’ access to local fresh food, contributing towards their food security.
- Continuing the ongoing revitalization efforts of Coamo’s urban and historic center.
- Positively impacting the local economy, particularly the agricultural industry.

Additionally, the steering committee identified an underutilized site in downtown to potentially serve as the space for the future farmers market and community center. The site, a building shell vacant since 2003, is conveniently located one block from the central plaza. The steering committee named the site La Esperanza, a Spanish word translating into “Hope” and signifying the community’s optimism during the post-hurricane recovery efforts. Figure 5 illustrates the site’s existing conditions.



Figure 5 – The steering committee designated this site as the future home of Coamo’s farmer’s market and community center. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

## LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Maria A. Maurás Colón**, Municipality of Coamo

**Cristina Miranda Palacios**, El Taller D

**Elvin R. Colón Correa**, Municipality of Coamo

**Alba R. Santiago Colón**, Municipality of Coamo

**Yanira I. Davila Pérez**, Municipality of Coamo

Figure 4 – Local Foods, Local Places steering committee in Coamo, Puerto Rico.

The remainder of this report and appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the community’s goals.

Over the course of eight planning calls and workshop discussions, the community’s goals evolved from those in the initial request for technical assistance to the four shown later in this report. They reflect the holistic, collaborative approach to community development already underway in Coamo, Puerto Rico.

## Engagement

The technical assistance engagement process for Local Foods, Local Places has three phases, illustrated in Figure 6 below. The assessment phase consists of multiple preparation conference calls with the steering committee to establish the workshop goals, agenda, logistics, and stakeholder invitation lists. The convening phase includes the effort’s capstone event—a two-day workshop in the community. The next steps phase includes three follow up conference calls as well as process reporting and documentation.

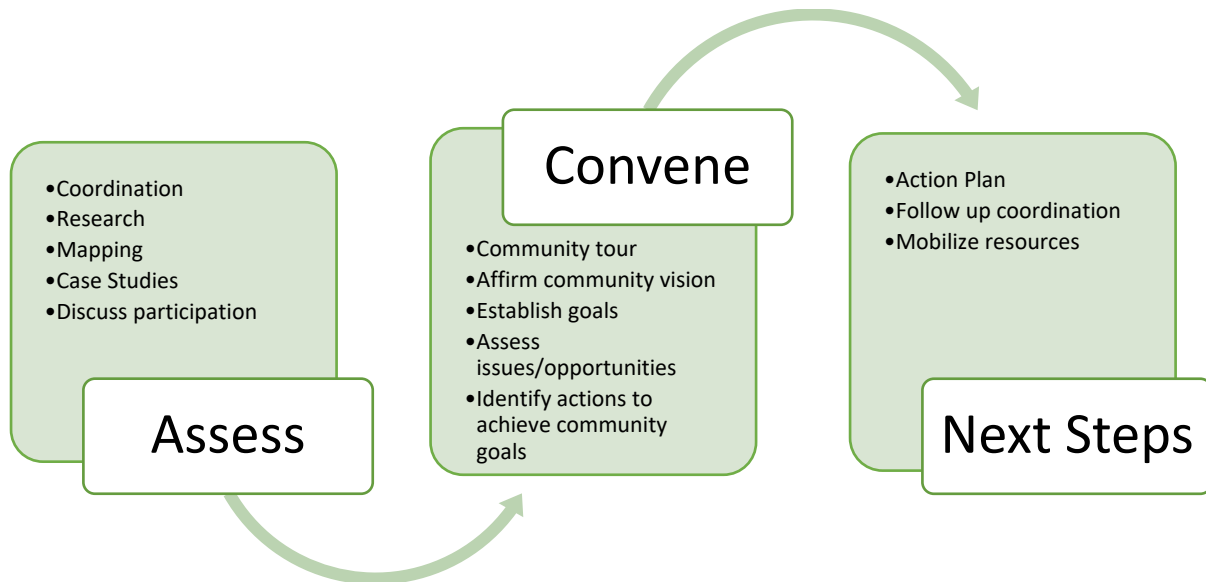


Figure 6 - Local Foods, Local Places technical assistance process diagram.

The community workshop was held on February 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Day 1 included a small lunch gathering with the steering committee members and federal partners, a tour of the community, and an evening community open house at La Esperanza, located in downtown. Day 2 featured an action-planning session at the Plaza Apartments, also in downtown. The workshop sign-in sheets are provided in **Appendix A**.

## Community Tour

The Local Foods, Local Places steering committee organized a community tour of key places and projects in the Coamo area on February 7 for the technical assistance team, representatives from federal agencies, and other key stakeholders. The tour included a walk through downtown with stops at the Hollywood Theater, the central plaza and the Church of San Blas de Illesca, the future Hotel Posada, the Coamo Museum, and La Esperanza – the future site for the farmers market and community center. Following the community tour, attendees traveled to the outskirts of the downtown to visit the Hotel Parador Banos de Coamo along with a stop at the hot thermal springs. The tour provided an overview of the city’s history and culture as well as its challenges and opportunities. **Appendix B** contains additional pictures from the community tour and workshops.



*Figure 7 – The technical assistance team, steering committee members, representatives from federal agencies, and other key stakeholders began the community tour from Coamo’s town hall. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning*

Following the tour, the technical assistance team, representatives from federal agencies, steering committee members, and other stakeholders met at La Gota de Rojas, a restaurant bordering the central plaza, for a luncheon. The luncheon allowed the attendees an opportunity to engage in informal discussions on the current local food system, revitalization efforts, and future potential actions in Coamo.

## Community Open House: Vision and Values

To align with the local culture of the Coamo community, encourage public participation, and provide an aid for visualizing the farmers market and community center, the steering committee and technical assistance team organized a community open house at the future farmers market site. The open house created a festival-like atmosphere featuring four stations, each with activities designed to engage participants and gather input on the local food system and place-based needs of the community.

The community open house consisted of the following four stations and associated activities:

- **Station 1: Local Foods, Local Places Opportunities and Challenges** - participants explored the challenges with accessing local food, identified place-based opportunities and local food sources via mapping exercises, and contributed to a brainstorming activity on the components of the local food cycle.
- **Station 2: Creativity for Kids, Teens, and Adults** - participants visualized their favorite healthy and fresh food, food their family members produce, or foods they’d like to grow in their own backyards, at a community garden, or at school.



- **Station 3: Vision for the Farmers market** - participants shared their aspirations for the future farmers market and community center in La Esperanza site.
- **Station 4: Get Involved** – participants could sign-up as potential vendors, volunteers, or to engage in the process in other ways.

To incentivize participation in the open house, each participant received a ticket (Figure 8) upon arrival. The ticket contained numbers representing each of the four activity stations. If attendees participated in all four stations, they would receive a hole punch at each station; four-hole punches could be redeemed for a free taco from a local food truck vendor.

The open house format and incentive-based approach resulted in a great collection of feedback from the community. The open house was attended by over 79 adults and hundreds of children that participated as part of an afterschool program field trip.

The technical assistance team, with the help of volunteers, facilitated the various activities at each station and assisted participants with recording their input.

These activities and exercises identified the community’s desire to improve street life and activity offerings throughout downtown. Figure 9 illustrates the dot mapping exercise where workshop participants identified the community’s assets (green dots) and the areas needing improvements (red dots). This reflects the community’s pride in its historic central plaza and the activities occurring in and around the plaza and their desire to improve the existing conditions of La Esperanza.

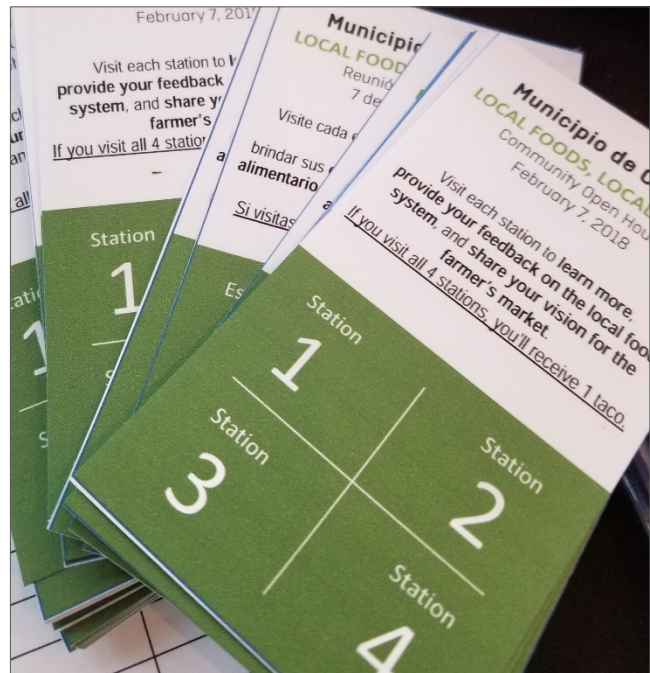


Figure 8 - Community open house tickets indicating the four stations and instructions for redeeming the free taco. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning



Figure 9 – Dot exercise map identifying place-based opportunities and challenges in Downtown Coamo. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning



While there is an agriculture industry within the Coamo community and its surrounding areas, there seems to be a gap between local production and local consumption. Attendees shared their knowledge of the individuals, organizations, and businesses involved in each sector of the food system. Many identified components of the marketing sector of the food system, particularly the various national supermarkets residents depend on for their produce needs.

The community recognizes the need to reinforce the importance of the local food system and the local food efforts taking place in Coamo.

Figure 10 shows a word cloud representing frequently used words in participants' responses when asked for their vision for the future

farmers market and community center. It was with this positive and forward-thinking backdrop of values and visions for the future that the remainder of the workshop efforts was built upon.

A summary of all the workshop exercises and the community's feedback is presented in **Appendix C**.

On the second day, the technical assistance team shared case studies focusing on establishing and operating a farmers market, and of food-based businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities that could emerge from catalyst food-based projects. The case studies sparked conversations among workshop participants about the opportunities and challenges associated with a farmers market in downtown Coamo. Figure 11 summarizes the thoughts shared by participants. Through these conversations and the results of the open house, the community's goals were further refined, evolving into action plan implementation tables that are detailed at the end of this report.

In addition to developing an action plan, the technical assistance team also facilitated the development of a community-generated design vision for the La Esperanza site. As a first step in the design visioning process, the technical assistance team analyzed both the site and surrounding area from a professional planning perspective and sought input of participants on their vision for the future market during the workshops.



Figure 10 – Word cloud showing the frequently used words when participants shared their vision for the farmers market at the open house. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Challenges:

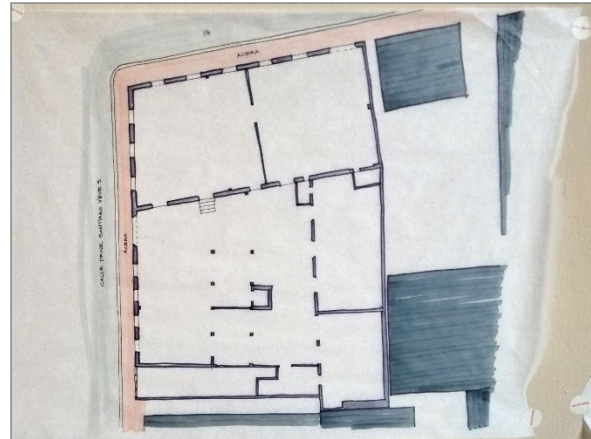
- There are not enough activities offered for youth in downtown.
- There is a perception of no parking availability within downtown, however, there is plenty of supply.
- Open markets are not popular on the island; it would be a new experience which can present difficulties.
- There is a lack of general knowledge of available local produce and benefits of eating local foods.
- The hours of operation and overall convenience could be barriers to using the market (consider lunchtime or after-work hours).

### Opportunities:

- Involve youth in local food strategies .
- Integrate a culture and arts into the future market.
- Increase local agricultural production.
- Provide education opportunities for residents, such as cooking demonstrations.
- Involve existing restaurant community and create opportunities for new businesses .
- Enhance recycling and composting initiatives.

*Figure 11- Workshop participants' summarized thoughts on the challenges and opportunities present in the local food system and downtown revitalization efforts with the future farmers market.*

While La Esperanza is an unoccupied site, there is an existing structure of interior and exterior walls. A visual plan view representation of the site's existing structure is available in Figure 12. Bold, black lines represent the existing walls throughout the site.



*Figure 12 – Plan view representation of the existing structure on the site, La Esperanza. Plan by: Ron Batcher, USDA Agricultural Marketing Services*

The proposed design vision (Figure 13) for La Esperanza reuses existing structures and enhances the space through added features. The design vision reflects the desired program elements that participants identified during the workshop. It includes a covered seating area along the interior perimeter of the building. The seating areas are positioned along the windows allowing street life to permeate through the structure. The design proposes an area for live music and designates the center portion of the market for circulation space and vendor stalls.

La Esperanza is envisioned as a multi-purpose space, accommodating both the downtown farmers market and community events. Additional vetting of this design concept, site programming, and identifying essential improvements are a part of the community's action plan. The following section presents the action plan.

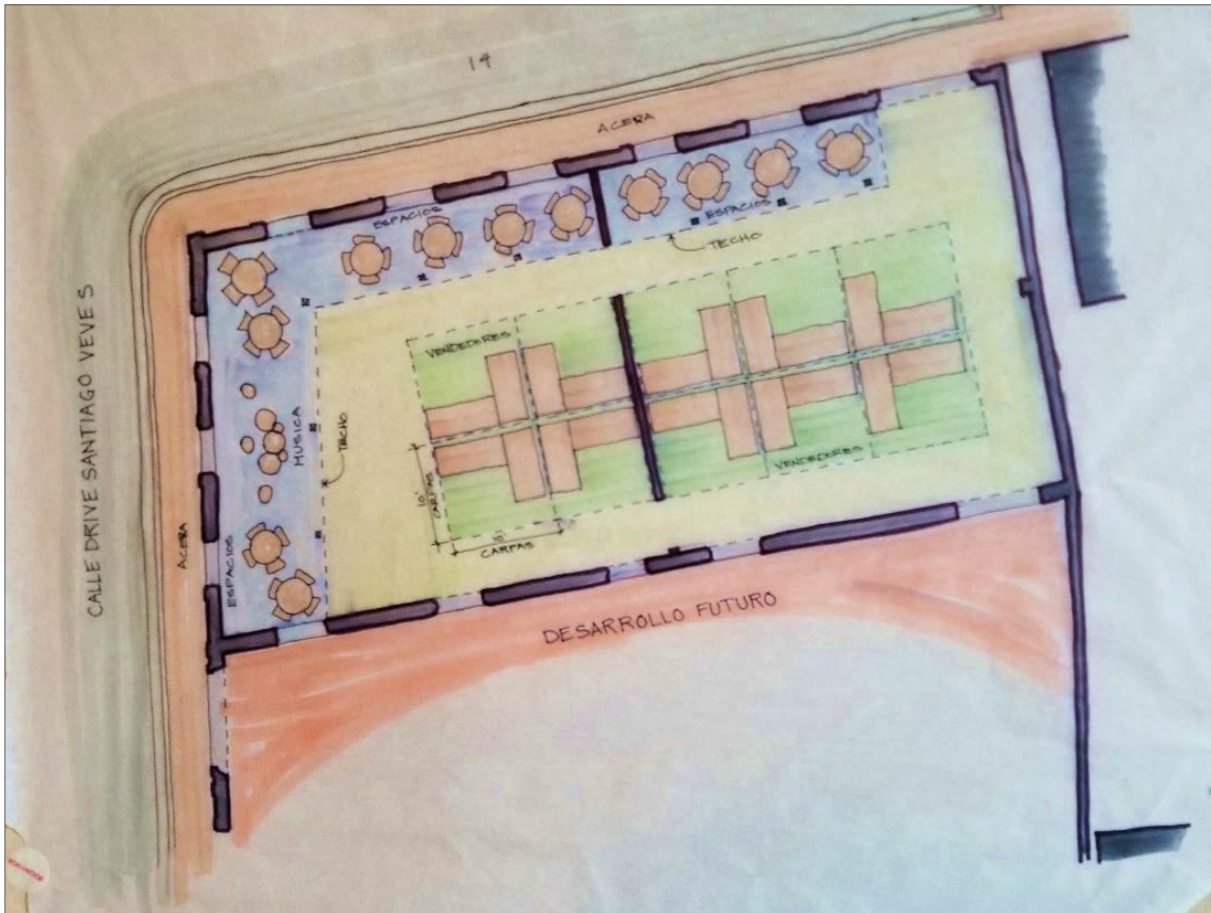


Figure 13 – Plan view representation of the design vision for La Esperanza. The design vision reuses the existing structure and organizes the space to accommodate vendor stalls and seating and performance areas. Concept plan by: Ron Batcher, USDA Agricultural Marketing Services

## Action Plan

The culminating product of the workshop is a community action plan. The plan is organized around four community goals and includes actions the participants brainstormed at the workshop and additional refinements to these goals and actions made during follow-up coordination calls with the local project committee. The following action plan matrix helps to identify needed actions, prioritize next steps, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward.

### **GOAL 1: Rehabilitate the site for use as a community multi-use space and a future farmers market (Creating A New Community Space)**

A priority goal for Coamo is to continue revitalizing its downtown by identifying opportunities for businesses and attractions that interest and meets its residents' needs. The community has identified a site just a block from the central plaza that could serve as a multi-purpose space for cultural and educational programming and a future farmers market. The site has remained unoccupied since 2003

and could be rehabilitated before it fully serves the community’s needs. The following actions describe specific steps to achieve this goal.

<b>Action 1.1: Identify the potential multi-use programming for the site and the associated logistics.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Identifying the potential uses for the site could help establish a baseline of the site improvements needed. The uses could complement the community’s needs and interests. For example, workshop participants proposed that the site could host youth performances and general entertainment and two potential site improvements could consist of adding seating areas and sheltered spaces.</p> <p>It is also important to identify logistical aspects for hosting various activities and events. For example, workshop participants identified the site may need designated zones for vendors to load and unload their produce when it is in use as a farmers market.</p> <p>Identifying the multiple uses intended for the site and their associated logistics could help identify the visibility, accessibility, and configuration improvements needed. Furthermore, it could help identify necessities and amenities such as, lighting placement, water and power sources, restrooms, and composting and recycling areas. Additional ideas could be explored to determine short-term and long-term solutions for improving the site.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify potential multi-use programming and associated logistics and improvements.</li> <li>- Identify potential farmers market programming and associated logistics and improvements.</li> <li>- Determine feasibility of each potential programming activity, logistics, and needed improvements.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	6 months: Identify necessary improvements
<b>Lead</b>	Coamo, Office of Planning and Projects (Elvin)
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Farmers, artisans, local chefs and community members
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD based on program
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	Federal Sources: USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grant; USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Foods Promotion and Farmers Market Promotion programs (See Appendix D for additional information on these potential funding sources.)



<b>Action 1.2: Rehabilitate site and existing building structure to accommodate a future farmers market and other cultural/educational/business uses as defined by the multi-use program.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Currently, the site consists of a building shell that’s remained unoccupied since a fire in 2003. A portion of the building’s exterior walls and an interior load-bearing wall remain erect; there is no roof and portions of the floor are uneven. While the walls that remain are stable, workshop participants noted the building shell needs infrastructure improvements to fully optimize its access and accommodate safe spaces for community events, activities, vendors, and a farmers market.</p> <p>The results of Action 1.1 could help determine design and construction decisions. These site improvements may require financial investments, professional expertise, and a long-term plan. Workshop participants identified monetary and technical assistance grant programs could help with revitalizing this space.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successfully complete a plan of site improvements and shop for potential grant funding.</li> <li>- Approval of grant and improvement plans.</li> <li>- Construction of farmers market.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 months: Finalize necessary improvements and potential grants; draft and submit grant applications; prepare improvement plans</li> <li>- 12 months: Receive grant and improvement plan approvals</li> <li>- 18 months: Begin construction</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	Coamo, Office of Planning and Projects (Elvin)
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Farmers, artisans, local chefs and community members
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD based on program. Design and construction costs could be prioritized
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	Federal Sources: USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grant; USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Foods Promotion and Farmers Market Promotion programs (See Appendix D for additional information on these potential funding sources.)

## **GOAL 2: Create a Local Foods, Local Places Coalition (Building Community Support)**

The local foods, local places concept includes the idea of bringing together the local food production, economic development, place-making, and public health goals and initiatives together as a cohesive and mutually supportive set of strategies. The creation of a coalition could provide the organizing structure to do so. The coalition could establish membership in a manner that brings together complementary stakeholders and resources (human and financial) to advance the actions described herein.

Action 2.1: Establish a Local Foods, Local Places steering committee to connect the local food, economic development, and public health initiatives.	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>There is a need to bring together the local food production, economic development, place-making, and public health advocates and staff, and other interested parties, into a formal steering committee structure so that the coalition building could begin.</p> <p>A steering committee could bring together various parties and island-wide interests that are all working towards a common goal in support of Coamo’s local food system—including individuals, organizations, businesses, and anchor institutions. The steering committee could serve as an overarching entity that fosters connections and facilitates collaboration through alliances and partnerships and serves as a base for sharing resources and knowledge.</p> <p>In addition, the steering committee could assume a management role in organizing food-focused events, community activities, and workshops; developing programs (such as an elderly assistance and an outreach program); and overseeing the creation of the farmers market.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Track number of members that join the steering committee’s effort.</li> <li>- Map the extent of the steering committee network.</li> <li>- Maintain an active contact list of interested parties and residents.</li> <li>- Host regular meetings to facilitate collaboration and share information among the subnetworks.</li> <li>- Facilitate emails and immediate feedback.</li> <li>- Organize and maintain community calendars including activities hosted by the various parties.</li> <li>- Create a workplan.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 month: Establish the steering committee.</li> <li>- 3 months: Set-up regular meetings for the steering committee and identify potential existing and new interested parties.</li> <li>- 6 months: Establish a workplan.</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	<p>The steering committee could assign its members lead roles for each of these activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community calendar</li> <li>- Elderly assistance</li> <li>- Agriculture subnetwork</li> <li>- Others</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<p>Coamo, Feliciano (farmer), Eilena Faros, UPR Mayaguez Extension, schools, Department of Agriculture, community associations, and Betsy Nolasco</p>

<b>Action 2.1: Establish a Local Foods, Local Places steering committee to connect the local food, economic development, and public health initiatives.</b>	
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Volunteer time</li> <li>- Donated meeting space</li> <li>- Use of Coamo’s website for hosting event calendar</li> <li>- Promotional materials, refreshments</li> </ul>
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coamo or other partner</li> </ul>

<b>Action 2.2: Develop a local food educational campaign in concert with other local efforts oriented towards growing locally and eating fresh, nutritious, local foods.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>A main challenge for Coamo is changing its residents’ existing perceptions and behaviors surrounding food. During the community workshop, few residents could identify local farms or local food brands. Residents are accustomed to purchasing food from supermarkets or big-box retailers carrying nationally recognized brands. Approximately 80 percent of produce and goods sold in Puerto Rico are imported, which increases food costs and compromises freshness.</p> <p>Some participants identified the elderly population as a key resource for establishing a food-focused educational campaign. Many elderly residents cultivate herbs and vegetables for consumption at home, however, this practice is not passed on to younger generations. A local food system is not widely recognized as an economic contributor or factor in the quality of life among Coamo’s residents.</p> <p>Many residents report limited knowledge about producing or consuming healthy, local foods. Providing educational opportunities to residents, farmers, and other stakeholders on producing and consuming local, healthy foods may help residents learn about local and healthy food options, and support understanding, participating in, and benefiting from the local food economy.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase in the total amount of local food production (produce, poultry, etc.).</li> <li>- Educational program regarding health, economic and environmental benefits of locally grown food incorporated into local school curriculum.</li> <li>- Steady increase in sales at Coamo Farmer’s Market.</li> <li>- Increase in the locally grown offerings at local supermarkets.</li> <li>- Improved health statistics – measure current and future health statistics.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	6 to 24 months
<b>Lead</b>	Office of Community Development

<b>Action 2.2: Develop a local food educational campaign in concert with other local efforts oriented towards growing locally and eating fresh, nutritious, local foods.</b>	
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Department of Education</li> <li>- Department of Health</li> <li>- Sistema de Salud</li> <li>- USDA Foods and Nutrition Services</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	Health providers

<b>Action 2.3: Build a local food legacy among youth by connecting with the Farm-to-Schools effort and encouraging youth sales at the farmers market.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Coamo has several programs and initiatives focused on youth’s access to fresh, healthy food. Currently, there are four schools in Coamo with gardens and programs that engage youth in cultivating fruits and vegetables. As a recipient of the 2017 Farm-to-School grant program administered by USDA, Coamo plans to enhance its current efforts by establishing additional programs in schools related to cultivating foods for use in its schools’ cafeterias. Working towards a resilient local food economy requires engaging youth who are the future farmers and consumers in Coamo.</p> <p>Workshop participants determined more efforts are needed to instill awareness, knowledge, and pride among youth with respect to local foods, farming, and health. These efforts could include: hands-on and engaging activities that teach youth how to grow and prepare their own foods, competitions that demonstrate and instill pride in their skills, and internships that help foster entrepreneurial opportunities.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of gardens in Coamo schools.</li> <li>- School garden grown products at farmers market.</li> <li>- Youth food grower competition (like the 4-H Youth Leadership Program).</li> <li>- Number of summer farm internships for students.</li> <li>- Number of afterschool or summer food system activities.</li> <li>- Youth-oriented events at farmers market.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate: organize youth-oriented activities in the planning stages of the farmers market.</li> <li>- 3 months (April 2018): Approach local growers on hosting student internships for the Summer 2018; kick-off internship program by Summer 2018.</li> <li>- 1 year: organize a youth food grower competition for the upcoming school year and maintain a yearly competition thereafter.</li> </ul>



<b>Action 2.3: Build a local food legacy among youth by connecting with the Farm-to-Schools effort and encouraging youth sales at the farmers market.</b>	
<b>Lead</b>	Proyecto Futuro
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Municipality of Coamo, Instituto Tercera Mision, Extension 4H Program
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	Farm-to-School Grant assistance (See Appendix D for additional information on this program)

**GOAL 3: Establish a financially sustainable farmers market (Starting A New Farmers Market in the Community)**

A priority goal for Coamo is the establishment of a farmers market in the downtown. The purpose of the market would be to support economic vitality in downtown and provide an incubator space for food-related enterprises including locally grown produce, poultry, fish, and dairy products; additional value-added food products; and prepared foods. The Municipality of Coamo has a long tradition of investing in municipally run business enterprises. These could serve as catalytic opportunities to seed new private businesses and/or provide revenue-producing income for the public sector. There is a desire to establish the proposed farmers market through the Municipal Enterprise program in the short term but to have it operate independently over time.

<b>Action 3.1: Identify vendors and products for sale.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Quality vendors are a vital component of farmers markets. Equally important is offering products and services that meet the community’s needs. Aligning these two components are critical for a successful farmers market as it could influence its programming, coordination, and design configurations.</p> <p>Workshop participants determined a main goal for creating a successful farmers market is to design a market for use by all. Consequently, it is important to identify the products (artisanal crafts and produce) and services that offer something for all ages to enjoy at convenient times and that align with the community’s needs. Action 4.1 focuses on conducting a food inventory and assessment which could serve as a pre-cursor to this action.</p> <p>Residents are more likely to shop at the market if it is an attractive, convenient place to shop for produce. Initially, offers to vendors could be extended for their support and participation in launching the market. If the market successfully attracts consistent customers, it might result in vendors generating consistent income and an expansion in the number of vendors selling at the market.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identification and commitment of 3-5 initial vendors.</li> <li>- Number of vendors increases overtime.</li> <li>- Percentage of space filled in farmers market.</li> </ul>

<b>Action 3.1: Identify vendors and products for sale.</b>	
<b>Timeframe</b>	8 months
<b>Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning and Economic Development</li> <li>- Finances (these may be Coamo Departments?)</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Association of local entrepreneurs, auctioning board, and A committee
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	Staff time to conduct outreach; may include some initial incentives provided by municipality to encourage vendor participation
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incentives from the Centro de Gestion Unica Laboral</li> <li>- Pathstone</li> <li>- Instituto Socioeconómico Comunitario, Inc</li> <li>- SDSU’s Online Guidebook includes additional information on assessing vendor support (see Appendix E for a direct link to this resource)</li> </ul>

<b>Action 3.2: Begin selling produce at La Esperanza site or in town square (pre-rehabilitation-discussed in Goal 1).</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Currently, La Esperanza site—the proposed site for the future farmers market and community space—and the town square are both good locations to begin hosting vendors and producers in the near-term. While Goal 1 focuses on establishing a physical structure for hosting the farmers market and community activities at La Esperanza, it is a long-term goal.</p> <p>Beginning to sell produce at either location could help garner residents’ interest and support in a farmers market and help the Local Foods, Local Places steering committee understand the produce and vending needs of the community. This opportunity may help spread the word among the community (including residents, producers, and vendors) and provide insight on the operations and policies of the future farmers market.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify site for near-term market, including permits.</li> <li>- Plan market activities, operations (days and times), and advertisement.</li> <li>- Reach out and organize vendors.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	3 to 4 months
<b>Lead</b>	Coamo
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local producers and vendors</li> <li>- Schools and students</li> <li>- Volunteers</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	Coamo staff time to conduct planning and outreach efforts
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	TBD

Action 3.3: Establish an agricultural municipal enterprise and a support group of residents, businesses, vendors, and students to develop the market (in concert with action 3.1).	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>The municipality of Coamo operates several for-profit businesses that were initially created to boost the local economy. These businesses created new jobs in the area allowing residents the opportunity to generate an additional income stream and allowed Coamo to contribute to its own economic development and downtown revitalization efforts.</p> <p>The municipality of Coamo is currently the driving force behind establishing the farmers market as a municipal enterprise. Workshop participants identified the municipality may need the community’s support to effectively plan, launch, and establish the market.</p> <p>Over time, the market’s operations and fiscal responsibility would turn over to a resident- and business-led cooperative, as described in Action 3.4, and would no longer rely on municipal economic aid.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generate interest among potential vendors and the community to gain their commitment.</li> <li>- Administer monthly survey to vendors.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	0 to 6 months
<b>Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Municipality of Coamo</li> <li>- Daisy de Jesus</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Local vendor and growers
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No cost</li> <li>- Aggregate produce</li> </ul>
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Farm-to-School Grant assistance (See Appendix D for additional information on this program.)</li> <li>- South Dakota State University Online Guidebook includes additional information on forming a market association (See Appendix E for a direct link to this resource.)</li> </ul>

Action 3.4: Establish consistent marketing, promotion, and outreach communications for the new market.	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Workshop participants discussed the challenges and opportunities with garnering residents’ attention for buying local and fresh produce. Currently, residents rely on local supermarkets and big-box retailers for their groceries. A farmers market is a new and unique experience for Coamo residents and there is a probability they could resist change. To compete with larger and long-established businesses and align with residents’ current comfort levels with those businesses, workshop participants identified a need to creatively promote the farmers market under one cohesive brand. This could, in turn, begin to build a loyal customer base, which could further incentivize farmers and vendors to continue their commitment and participation in the farmers market.</p> <p>The brand could be inclusive of all products and produce sold at the farmers market regardless of individual vendors. The brand could evoke Coamo’s unique story and extend beyond the visual communications into the overall customer shopping experience and education. Workshop participants also determined it is important to establish an outreach and marketing plan that consistently delivers a cohesive message to residents, food producers, and vendors.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<p>Development of a brand and marketing plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies a local food brand for Coamo’s farmers market.</li> <li>- Establishes and outreach and marketing campaign.</li> <li>- Recognizes the value of local, healthy foods and clearly communicates the benefits.</li> <li>- Uses social media as a platform to communicate with residents.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediately: Use social media</li> <li>- 6 to 9 months: Develop a marketing plan</li> <li>- 1 year: Launch a campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	Steering Committee on marketing and outreach
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Municipal Department of Communications and Culture</li> <li>- Local schools for educational component</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$5,000 to develop a marketing and communications plan</li> <li>- Volunteers</li> <li>- Purchase social media ads to “bump” up outreach</li> <li>- Printing costs for informative flyers and brochures</li> </ul>
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TBD</li> <li>- South Dakota State University’s Online Guidebook includes additional information on promotion opportunities for farmers markets (See Appendix E for a direct link to this resource.)</li> </ul>



<b>Action 3.5: Create an organization to take the form of an agriculture cooperative.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Setting a formal organization and governance structure for the farmers market is important for protecting the market’s long-term viability. While the Municipality of Coamo may initially invest in setting-up the farmers market, as mentioned in Action 3.1, workshop participants identified that an agriculture cooperative could assume the responsibilities of operating and managing the market once it’s established.</p> <p>The cooperative’s board of directors could make critical decisions on the objectives and goals for the farmers market; develop bylaws, operating rules, and regulations; and support the mission statement. In addition, the board would have fiscal responsibilities for overseeing the market’s budget and finances and for identifying and pursuing grant funding.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	Net zero costs
<b>Timeframe</b>	TBD
<b>Lead</b>	Agriculture Co-op Board of Directors
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USDA Rural Development, Economic Development Administration (EDA), and Agricultural Extension</li> <li>– Margaret M. Bau, Cooperative Development Specialist, Rural Development, USDA, phone: 715-345-7671, email: Margaret.Bau@wdc.usda.gov</li> <li>– Appendix E includes local food system resources in Puerto Rico that could help</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TBD</li> <li>- South Dakota State University’s Online Guidebook includes additional information on promotion opportunities for farmers markets, see Appendix E for a direct link to this resource.</li> </ul>

<b>Action 3.6: Establish a management and operating model for the farmers market.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Establishing a management and operating model may benefit the day-to-day of the farmers market, as it might determine how the market is organized, its rules and regulations, its principles for customer service, and the vendor support and trainings that could be offered.</p> <p>Workshop participants identified a best practice assessment of other operating and management structures could help determine the best choice for Coamo’s farmers market. Understanding how other markets are structured and weighing the pros and cons of each model could help Coamo formulate a structure that best meets the local needs.</p>

<b>Action 3.6: Establish a management and operating model for the farmers market.</b>	
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establishment of a Board of Directors.</li> <li>– Creation of market bylaws.</li> <li>– Establishment of a market manager.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 6 to 12 months: Identify a fiscal sponsor</li> <li>– 12 months</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	Agricultural Co-op
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Foods Promotion program</li> <li>– Incubator USDA Rural Development,</li> <li>– EDA</li> <li>– Margaret M. Bau, Cooperative Development Specialist, Rural Development, USDA, phone: 715-345-7671, email: Margaret.Bau@wdc.usda.gov</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Food Promotion Program Grant</li> <li>– South Dakota State University’s Online Guidebook includes additional information on set-up and operation of a farmers market (See Appendix E for a direct link to this resource.)</li> </ul>

<b>Action 3.7: Identify existing programs and entities that could provide business workshops for food entrepreneurs.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Coamo's farmers market could help expand the local economy. It is important to include existing food producers in this expansion as well as encourage and foster new entrepreneurship opportunities.</p> <p>Workshop participants described an existing culture among the elderly, in which they garden fruits, vegetables, and herbs at a small-scale for personal consumption. There is an opportunity to provide a training that targets these existing small-scale food producers and assist them in exploring the potential of starting their own business and scaling up their operations. Trainings and workshops could also help foster growth in existing businesses and encourage the development of new companies that could contribute to the long-term development of the local food economy.</p> <p>Partnering with educational institutions and non-profits to offer workshops and business planning assistance could help startup and early-stage businesses become financially viable companies.</p>

<b>Action 3.7: Identify existing programs and entities that could provide business workshops for food entrepreneurs.</b>	
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner agency or organization identified.</li> <li>- Number of vendor’s enrolled.</li> <li>- Percent of certificates of completion.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	12 months
<b>Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning and Economic Development Department</li> <li>- Finances Department</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agriculture Commerce and Exporting Department</li> <li>- Small Business Development Center</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	Municipality of Coamo

#### **GOAL 4: Create a strong, resilient local food system (Expand Community Food System)**

Puerto Rico’s history is deeply rooted in agriculture. Yet today, more than 80 percent of food consumed in Puerto Rico is brought in from off the island. While there remains some debate about the benefits of investing in agriculture relative to other economic development initiatives,<sup>6</sup> there is a growing interest in growing food locally, echoing trends across the U.S.<sup>7</sup> The aftermath of Hurricane Maria in September of 2017 also heightened the awareness of local access to food given the difficulty people had in getting food post-storm. The hurricane devastated many of the existing agricultural systems in Puerto Rico which further raised concerns about how to create a more resilient local food system. All these dynamics present an opportunity for the community of Coamo to invest in strengthening its local food system.

<b>Action 4.1: Conduct a food system inventory and assessment.</b>	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>A food inventory and assessment may help Coamo better understand the existing local food economy and identify gaps and opportunities within it. The food inventory could include all local entities involved in food production, distribution, processing, preparation, purchasing, consumption, and recycling and composting.</p> <p>This inventory and assessment would help clarify what foods and products are produced within Coamo and its immediate surrounding region, how the goods are distributed to consumers, and the current behaviors with composting and recycling.</p> <p>This inventory and assessment would also help to identify the types of foods and products that could be sold in the farmers market, as well as potential vendors, discussed in Goal 3.</p>

<sup>6</sup> <https://publish.illinois.edu/lfr/2017/01/15/agriculture-in-puerto-rico-a-brief-analysis>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/puerto-rico-experiences-agricultural-renaissance-n656001>

<b>Action 4.1: Conduct a food system inventory and assessment.</b>	
<b>Measures of success</b>	Map of the agricultural system in Coamo and surrounding municipalities
<b>Timeframe</b>	4 months
<b>Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Mayaguez Extension, Hermeana Ziyas</li> <li>- Mr. Barrios</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	- Highschool student volunteers (formal or informal commitment), Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, Coamo's Finance Department, UPR Mayaguez Extension, EDA, and USDA (EDA and USDA may have resources and may be able to help with efforts to make the farmers market site an important food distribution point after hurricane events.)
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	Costs may vary, aim for pro-bono work/volunteer
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	TBD

<b>Action 4.2: Work with FEMA and other post-Hurricane Maria partners to assess local access to food issues/lessons learned.</b>	
What this is and why it is important	Given the impacts of Hurricane Maria, there is a strong need to facilitate lessons-learned discussions within Coamo, and its partners, to identify strategies that could ensure access to food in the case of a natural disaster.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting with key partners to identify lessons learned from Hurricane Maria.</li> <li>- Identification of key lessons learned and follow-up action items.</li> </ul>
Timeframe	2 months
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Municipality of Coamo</li> <li>- FEMA</li> </ul>
Supporting cast	UPR Mayaguez Extension
Costs and/or resources needed	TBD
Possible funding sources	TBD

Action 4.3: Develop a local food production and resiliency plan aimed at promoting locally grown and produced foods; and addressing food access post-natural disasters.	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	Many community members struggled with getting access to food post-Hurricane Maria. Therefore, there is a strong interest in developing a local food resiliency plan that would enable pre-storm planning and post-storm strategies to ensure access to foods. Pre-storm planning could include identifying strategies for food production and storage, and post-storm strategies could involve local food distribution. It could also involve incorporating resilient agricultural practices into local farming operations.
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resiliency plan.</li> <li>- List of lessons learned from past events.</li> <li>- Food distribution plan and emergency contact list.</li> <li>- List of food storage sites and maps.</li> <li>- Sustainable, resilient agricultural practices workshops.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 to 8 months (ideally prior to next hurricane season): identify lessons learned from past emergency events, begin a contact list, and develop a resiliency plan</li> <li>- Annually: Update plan and contact lists</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Farmers</li> <li>- Coamo</li> <li>- Manager of farmers market</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting cast</b>	Community
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$5,000 to \$6,000 to develop a plan</li> <li>- Coamo staff time</li> </ul>
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	TBD



Action 4.4: (Re)use vacant lots and underutilized spaces to create demonstration projects, examples of locally grown foods.	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	<p>Throughout Coamo’s downtown there are underutilized and vacant properties that negatively impact street life and residents’ perception of safety. While the municipality has undertaken several revitalization and restoration efforts, the remaining vacant and underutilized properties are an opportunity to enhance downtown’s sense of place and creatively display Coamo’s history and culture. These properties are centrally located to homes, schools, and businesses, making them convenient access points for residents.</p> <p>The temporary use of these spaces, particularly for gardens and other farming activities, could improve access to fresh produce, increase awareness among residents, and encourage residents’ contribution to the local food system. Allowing short-term and temporary uses could also result in long-term established businesses and community centers.</p>
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct an inventory of vacant and underutilized properties downtown.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify the number of empty storefronts that are privately owned versus municipal (publicly owned) properties.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Identify a list of potential types of temporary uses that support the local food system (garden, chicken coup, farmers market, other).</li> <li>- Develop a strategic plan.</li> <li>- Number of permits for temporary use of spaces.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 months to 1 year: conduct inventory and map of property in Coamo, identify temporary uses (picture in empty storefronts, mapping sites), and provide permits for short-term use.</li> <li>- 1 year: legal review of site status and permits, and identify legal and environmental issues associated with each property for long-term use.</li> <li>- 2 years: Identify temporary uses that could become a formal establishment (for example, establish farmers market or a community center).</li> </ul>
<b>Lead</b>	Coamo
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Growers, farmers, and cottage growers</li> <li>- Community volunteers to support next steps</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coamo staff</li> <li>- Small business support</li> </ul>
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Federal government (specifically EPA with environmental clean-up)</li> <li>- National Park Service on tax credits for historic sites</li> <li>- HUD, improvement services</li> <li>- Coamo, legal fees and mapping costs</li> </ul>

Action 4.5: Connect existing local producers or future producers to resources aimed at encouraging growth and expansion of local growing and operations; connect these growers with other Puerto Rico-based local food networks.	
<b>What this is and why it is important</b>	Connecting food producers to resources that encourage growth and expansion in operations could help establish strong businesses and increase the number and diversity of food-based businesses in Coamo. These connections could also help strengthen the local food network throughout Puerto Rico and generate collaboration among producers, farmers, and distributors.  Resources could include: mentorship, business planning guidance, access to capital funding or grants, food safety education, marketing support, legal support.
<b>Measures of success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying available resources.</li> <li>- Establishing connections among local producers (current and future) and the available resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	6 months
<b>Lead</b>	Local Foods, Local Places steering committee (discussed in Action 2.1)
<b>Supporting cast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Producers, farmers, and vendors</li> <li>- Institutions with available resources (public and/or private)</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and/or resources needed</b>	TBD
<b>Possible funding sources</b>	USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion programs (Additional information is available in Appendix D.)

## Implementation and Next Steps

Three post-workshop conference calls were held during March and April 2018, following the workshop. The calls were held with the technical assistance team, the Local Foods, Local Places steering committee, representatives from federal agencies, and additional stakeholders whose interest was cultivated during the workshop. During the calls participants reviewed the action plan to refine it and add clarifying language and to share post-workshop actions and developments.

While the local steering committee has initiated conversations with federal and local agencies on this local food effort, their primary focus remains on post-hurricane recovery efforts. The local steering committee has identified additional members within the community to help implement the efforts outlined in the action plan.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Workshop Sign-in Sheets
- Appendix B – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix C – Workshop Feedback
- Appendix D – Funding Resources
- Appendix E – References