

## Op-Ed: A new threat to land use and food security in Puerto Rico

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As we wrap up September — Hunger Action Month — let's stand against hunger by protecting our agricultural lands. (Credit: Mantinov | Dreamstime.com)

The Joint Regulation for the Evaluation and Issuance of Permits Related to Development, Use of Land and Business Operation (Joint Regulation 2020) proposed by the current administration and whose public hearings were held last week, would allow, among other things, the combination of uses in the same soil.

This would put at risk many agricultural lands and natural areas of high ecological value in Puerto Rico. The undermining of what has already been achieved with the Land Use Plan in

2015 and ignoring the expert opinion of the scientific community and the Puerto Rico Climate Change Council, reveals the nefarious intentions of this regulation.

Three years after a devastating Category 4 hurricane, the proposal of this regulation seems like a mockery. Even more absurd is this new regulation when the food security of thousands of Puerto Ricans was at stake for many months, after the devastating phenomenon. Faced with a changing climate and our island condition, the protection of resources that ensure our food supply is an urgent matter.

Tackling hunger is one of the sustainable development goals or objectives set by the United Nations in 2015 and it was adopted by all Member States, just the same year that Puerto Rico — after a long struggle — achieved the approval of its Land Use Plan.

Instead of accelerating its progress towards Zero Hunger in 2030, with public policies that promote the development of sustainable agriculture, urban gardens and protection of the land, Puerto Rico walks backward, promoting the destruction of habitats, deforestation and allowing incompatible land uses in a move that defies any logic.

The child poverty rate in Puerto Rico is around 58%. Food insecurity is a determining factor in the definition of poverty. A 2015 Institute of Statistics study entitled "Food Security in Puerto Rico," recommended the development of public policies that protect the constitutional right of Puerto Ricans to their food and the development of interventions aimed at offering education on issues that include development of sustainable agriculture and community gardens.

Agricultural development is the most effective way to tackle hunger and poverty. According to the World Bank, every dollar invested in agriculture is two to three times as effective in reducing child poverty as investing in non-agricultural sectors. But instead of ensuring our children's food supply, we're aiming to fatten the pockets of developers and investors.

There is no analysis of the consequences of such a proposed plan. And this is where the real concern lies. It is not just about food sovereignty. Failure to promote compatible land use diminishes the capacity of the land's own functions, its regeneration for the development of other agrosystems, and its potential as an axis of economic development.

As we wrap up September — Hunger Action Month — let's stand against hunger by protecting our agricultural lands. It is time to reject this project that instead of placing Puerto Rico on the path to achieving Zero Hunger, it would place the island as food for vultures.



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The hunger of the many will feed the few.