



Written testimony from Brett Reinford for Public Hearing on Utility Scale Solar Development and Agricultural Land 9:00 AM Hearing Room 1, NOB or via Zoom on September 21, 2021

Honorable Chairman Vogel, Minority Chair Schwank, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee:

My name is Brett Reinford and I dairy farm with my father and brothers in Juniata County. We are early implementers of an anaerobic digester with which we not only help reduce our own carbon footprint, but also that of the community at large by taking in food waste. With rotation of our crops, no-till practices and cover crops and the recycling of carbon by growing and feeding forages to our cows we have been helping to decrease green house gasses for generations, and certainly long before it became the politically correct thing to do or solar energy became big business.

I regret that I am only able to share with you in writing the perspective of an active dairy farmer on the important issue developing utility scale solar development on agriculture land today. Much to my disappointment, there are no working farms on the agenda, and even if we had been invited to testify on this issue in person, it has been scheduled at precisely the time of year that makes it nearly impossible for a productive farm representative to leave the fields; during the most labor intensive part of the harvest season, to testify via Zoom or to travel to Harrisburg to do so in person. While I would much prefer to testify in person so that I might answer questions and offer a farmers' perspective to the testimony of those individuals from the solar industry and academics, my only option is to share some of my concerns, and those of many others in the dairy community in writing herein.

Like many of the farmers in my neighborhood and throughout the Commonwealth, my greatest concern is that some of the best land for growing food and fiber is the land of choice for these solar companies. At a minimum, utility scale solar installations should be kept off of Class 1 and Class 2 soils. As Chair of Pennsylvania's Dairy Future Commission, I can attest to how much of the twelve months we deliberated how to secure a future for productive agriculture when quality farmland parcels are too small and expensive for farmers. Dairy farmers need rented ground for crops and forage to feed their herds, recycling their nutrients. If rented ground is taken up by utility solar projects, this will have a huge, detrimental and harmful impact on local dairy farms that had rented this ground. Dairy families like mine cannot compete with the significant amounts of cash being paid by solar utility companies for leasing the land, and without ample land to grow feed, we will be forced to reduce herd sizes even more.

I am not against solar energy and I believe wholeheartedly with individuals' property rights, but there are so many other land use opportunities for utility solar projects more suited than prime farmland and, to be frank, there are a great many things property owners are prohibited from doing on their land. As a dairy farm, the list of things we can't do on our own property is staggering.

Even farmland with low quality soils, or that is fallow (unused), that might be a potential site for solar would need to ensure that water is still able to infiltrate the soil and that the ecosystem on

and near the marginal farmland is not negatively impacted. Surely, already developed industrial lands and brownfields are a better option for society in the long run.

The solar industry testifying today will likely try to frame some of the discussion about job creation and tax revenue, but I would argue that utility scale solar provides next to nothing in regard to full time jobs and tax revenue. The construction phase of a solar complex may be labor intensive, but is only temporary, and the skilled workforce will move on to their next project once construction is completed. They are temporary jobs that will not have the large and long term economic impact on our rural communities that our dairy farms have.

Consider that two acres supports one cow. If 2,000 acres of land is taken out of agricultural production for a solar installation targeted for our neighborhood, 1,000 cows would not be supported. And we know that every 10 cows supports one full-time job in Pennsylvania. Using this formula, 100 permanent agriculture jobs will be eliminated by the project near my farm in the very first year. That is a lot of permanent jobs in rural parts of Pennsylvania to give up for even four times as many one-to-two-year temporary construction jobs. If I decide to put our farm in solar and lay off our 23 full-time employees, is that a win for Pennsylvania? If they don't build these utility scale solar installations, we don't lose anything, but if they do we lose a great deal, that will not be recovered.

I appreciate your acceptance of my written testimony would be very pleased to expand on this brief statement if given the opportunity. It would certainly be beneficial for the Committee to hear from others in production agriculture regarding their perspective of large scale solar installations on productive farmland and I am certain that with sufficient notice, my fellow dairy farmers would do everything in their power to appear before you to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Reinford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "R".

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