

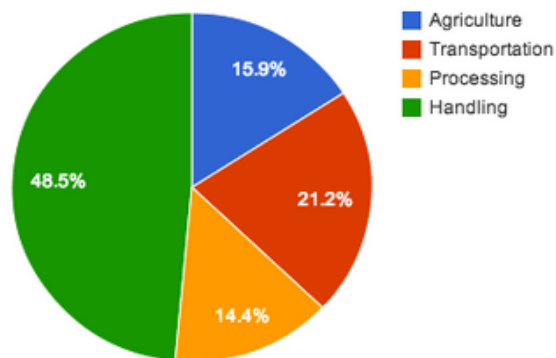
**Senate Environmental Resources & Energy and Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committees
Joint Committee on Solar Energy Deployment
PA Department of Agriculture
May 12th, 2021**

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture appreciates this opportunity to speak to this joint committee on solar energy and farmland.

Agriculture and related industries are significant to Pennsylvania's total economy. According to the study we released recently with the Team Pennsylvania Foundation, food and agriculture's total economic impact in 2019 was \$132.5 billion, accounting for nearly 600,000 jobs.

Agriculture and related industries rely heavily on a reliable, affordable supply of energy to thrive into the future. As the [chart below](#) demonstrates, almost half of that energy consumption is in ensuring safe food handling, that hot foods are kept hot enough, cold foods are kept cold enough, and frozen foods stay frozen. In other words, electricity is hugely important, including in consumers' homes.

Energy In Food Production



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Of the 15.9% of energy consumed in food production attributed to production agriculture, electricity also accounts for a sizeable chunk of energy used, such as a dairy farm that needs to keep its milk cold and heat water for sanitizing purposes. Farms also use gas and diesel fuels in trucks and tractors, natural gas for things like heating barns, and most farms rely on petro-chemically-based fertilizers and pesticides.

Renewable energy is one of those rare opportunities in agriculture that allows farmers to reduce their operating costs by supplying some of their own energy needs and offers a new source of revenue if they can produce more energy than is needed in their own operations.

It is because agriculture has a stake in both energy consumption and production that the Department of Agriculture has a seat on the board of the PA Energy Development Authority and is represented on the Governor's Green Government Council. Through these roles, we have a voice for agriculture in how the commonwealth's investments are governed, how a renewable energy future can be incentivized, and in how state government meets its own renewable energy commitments.

In discussions with our colleagues in government and our stakeholders, it is clear that solar energy production can and does play a positive role in production agriculture. While sometimes in conflict, often there is land use compatibility between solar energy production and production agriculture. As with other types of development, development of solar frequently seems targeted by industry to the flattest areas that often have the best soils for producing food. Competing land uses are not new to the agricultural landscape.

We take seriously the ways in which our land is used. We are also grateful for the legislative support that has allowed us to continue this important work. This land serves to increase food security, protect our agricultural heritage, and support adjacent natural resources. As in the past, there continue to be competing land uses that threaten future and existing farmland. The most recent “Farms Under Threat: State of the State’s” report from the American Farmland Trust notes there continue to be major risks to farmland across the commonwealth, particularly low-density residential development, generational transitions, and climate change. Fortunately, compared to all other states, the American Farmland Trust ranks Pennsylvania ranks 4th in policy response to farmland protection.

Over 1,000 of Pennsylvania’s 1,400 townships have created Agricultural Security Areas, or ASAs under Act 43 of 1988, expressing a desire to retain land use for primarily agricultural purposes. Being in an ASA is a condition to participating in the Farmland Preservation program which, with 596,827 acres preserved, leads the United States. Despite being a leader in farmland protection, we must continue to reevaluate new land uses as they come about. Utility scale solar is one such land use type. Solar differs from other land use types in that it has no emissions, produces no sound, and is not intended to be a permanent structure. The Department does not have a mechanism in statute through which to dictate where utility scale solar can be deployed. The only measures currently in place under the Department are the restriction of utility scale solar on land enrolled in farmland preservation and the Clean and Green preferential tax assessment program. All other considerations and limitations would fall to the local zoning codes.

The Department recommends that careful consideration take place when siting a utility scale solar installation on or near agricultural lands. Specifically, we recommend that prime farmland soil remains available for agricultural production and that placement of solar installations instead take place on rooftops, impervious surfaces or on less productive soils.

That said, there are many examples of solar and agriculture taking place simultaneously. In the cases of pastured livestock, apiaries, some specialty crops, and floriculture; solar can provide a multitude of benefits for the farmer. Just as many Pennsylvania farms have diversified their agriculture production to become more resilient, properly sited solar installations can serve as a further economic support. The fact that solar can be removed enables a farm to return to full agricultural production, something that may not be possible under other land use types, such as residential development, warehousing, and or other energy development.

In closing, farmland has always been and continues to be a critical part of Pennsylvania’s economy and heritage. The commonwealth’s agricultural communities face pressures from other land uses and will require careful attention now and into the future. Fortunately, we are one of just a few states that have

tools to address these concerns. Utility scale solar presents us with something new to consider in our conversations farmland protection. There are practical ways for utility scale solar to be responsibly deployed. Utility scale solar is not absent of risk, but provides an opportunity for farmers to diversify their portfolios while also ensuring more permanent forms of development do not compromise our agricultural land. In addition, the deployment of solar aids in the commonwealth's mission to address climate change, which has serious implications for the agricultural community as our state becomes warmer and wetter. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture will continue to support the agricultural community and work closely with our legislature to ensure that farms are conserved and sustainable.

We would be happy to address any questions members of the committee might have at this time.

Thank you.