

A landowner's perspective on solar

I heard from the opposition that solar is bad! Bad for the farmers, bad for the county! More than a year ago we were approached by representative of Geenex to see if we would be open to selling or leasing our 170-acre farm to an energy producing solar farm. At first we said no thanks!

But after further consideration we opened up to the idea and went on a fact-finding mission. We had our land for sale for the past two years with little interest. I had called our county agricultural agent to see what could be done to earn income from our land and was told to "mow it and pay the taxes." I was shocked! There's nothing you can raise to make any kind of income. I called the next year and he suggested leasing it out "you should make \$30 to \$35 dollars and acre," which I currently do. I'm close to 60, retired, and disabled. That lease money amounts to 1/3 of one percent for every dollar of property value and out of that I have to pay property tax and all repairs on barns, fences and roads. Needless to say, we lose money every year. I look at my property as an investment much like you would a 401k. Imagine having over a \$1.5 million dollar investment that you lose money on every year and no hope of a profit ever!

Now a company wants to give you a greater than 7 percent return on your investment with a guaranteed contract for 20 plus years. This will provide stable income for the rest of our lives. This is our only hope of saving our land from certain development. Look at it this way, potentially there will be more than 1,000 acres of land in northern Clark County that will be protected from development for at least 20 years and will remain much like it does today.

As I've stated we researched solar for at least a year, took a trip to North Carolina to see solar farms for ourselves, we talked to landowners and neighbors and also toured the Center for Energy Education. When I asked the landowner what his biggest regret was in leasing to solar his reply was "I wished I had put more land into it" as he still farmed peanuts and cotton and his income from solar made his other crops possible. We also hired a land lease attorney to review the contract. After much time researching and looking for the bad and reasons not to lease to solar we found nothing, only views may change but even that wasn't bad as the solar panels will be in grass (not gravel) the setback of at least 300 ft from roads and houses and a vegetative screen of trees and or bushes will be hiding most views. Property values will not be affected by surrounding properties (do your own searches on the internet). Property that has solar on it increases in value, land adjacent to solar increases slightly and home values are not affected. The land's ground cover will not be changed, only fence rows will be cleared and some roads may be constructed. There is no pollution produced and nothing to leak out as its only tempered glass and a film attached. These panels are installed on a rack, which are held up by driven posts (not concreted) much like the fence post farmers currently use.

The power at the sites are then uploaded to the grid, which supplies power everywhere including here, not only to the northeast like the coalition has stated. But if even if that were true, that is nothing new to Kentucky farmers as most all of our crops and livestock produced leave this state for a broader market!

Now what it could mean for the county is taxes and revenue. For a sample 100 MW project,

Clark County could receive \$23 million in revenues during construction, \$238,000+ in annual long-term revenue and 1.5 million in school tax revenue. As for jobs, per every 100 MW, there will be a few well-paying (\$30+ per hour) jobs after construction is completed (several hundred jobs during construction), but the need for local and regional contractors to keep the grounds mowed and maintained needed also. There will also be hardware stores, machinery rental, engineers and vehicle maintenance business supported. Opposition in our community stated there would be 1400 jobs lost in agricultural sector. This number is ridiculous as I know of few farms that hire any full-time workers. But I believe the main benefit to Clark County is that renewable energy is in! Most large company's want to be supplied by renewable energy by a certain date (RE100, look this up) and these companies will not locate here unless renewable energy is available!

If you own property and are denied the right to use it to make the best living for your family, in a way that protects the land and causing no issues for adjacent property owners other than their view. And from our trip to see actual solar farms, the view isn't bad at all! But if this doesn't happen many of these farms will be split up and sold for homes and subdivisions and that will be the end forever for this so-called prime land! Prime is not profitable and only a handful of farmers in Clark County actually make a primary living off the farm. Most have other income from other primary sources. Just look around the county and all you see is barns in disrepair and overgrown fence rows. This is land in distress and owners are trying to survive. We are not as vocal, but we have the right to do what's best for us too!

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