Promote Smart Solar℠ While Protecting Farmland

New England has committed to achieving at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. As a result of state renewable portfolio standards and related policies, demand for renewable energy in New England is growing rapidly. According to a 2019 study prepared for the Coalition for Community Solar Access, to achieve the region's 2050 clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction targets, New England will need to accelerate clean energy resource additions to between 4,000 and 7,000 MW per year on average.* Much of the additional capacity is projected to be new utility-scale solar, often located on farmland, followed by offshore wind. Solar energy development can create opportunities for farmers and landowners by generating new sources of income. Still, it also threatens farmer-renters who could be displaced, and it will have lasting impacts on local economies that are dependent on agricultural production.

NEW ENGLAND WILL NEED TO AVERAGE

4,000–7,000 MW of new clean energy

RESOURCES A YEAR TO MEET ITS 2050 CLEAN ENERGY AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION TARGETS.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a national leader in promoting Smart Solar Siting on farmland to support clean energy capacity while protecting our most viable agricultural lands from development pressures. In 2022, AFT released Smart Solar

ELIZA PATERSON

A Complimentary Planting of Corn, Squash, and Beans at Jack's Solar Garden in Longmont, Colorado.

* Hagerty, J. Michael., Weiss Jurgen. 2019. Achieving 80% GHG Reduction in New England by 2050. Accessed (4/12/2024): https://www.brattle.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/17233_achieving_80_percent_ghg_reduction_in_new_england_by_20150_september_2019.pdf

principles to ensure that solar projects are meeting three equally important goals: (1) accelerating solar energy development, (2) strengthening farm viability, and (3) safeguarding land well-suited for farming and ranching. AFT's four Smart Solar Guiding Principles include: (1) Prioritize Solar Siting on Buildings and Land Not Well Suited for Farming (2) Safeguard the Ability for Land to Be Used for Agriculture (3) Grow Agrivoltaics for Agricultural Production and Solar Energy, and (4) Promote Equity and Farm Viability.

JAMES HABANA HAFNER

Czajkowski Farm/Hyperion Systems LLC, Hadley, Massachusetts

Priorities

- Convene state-level multi-stakeholder groups that use consensus-building processes with representation from both developers and diverse members of the agriculture community, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) producers; small-scale and large-scale agricultural operations; young and/or beginning farmers; and both governmental and nonprofit organizations.
- Invest in market mechanisms incentivizing renewable energy development on degraded, already developed, or disturbed sites such as brownfield redevelopment areas and contaminated farmland.
- Fund research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects to test agrivoltaic systems.
- Develop and implement comprehensive mitigation fees that offset non-agrivoltaic solar development on prime and important farmland soils.
- Establish decommissioning bonds that pay for the removal of solar arrays at the end of their life cycle.
- Explore solar siting policies that incentivize land access opportunities for BIPOC producers.

Relevant New England Programming

- New England Smart Solar℠

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFT POLICY PLATFORM, please contact AFT's Senior New England Policy Manager Chelsea Gazillo, at cgazillo@farmland.org or the New England Policy Associate, Eliza Paterson, at epaterson@farmland.org.