

PROMOTING SMARTER SOLAR SITING FOR THE FUTURE OF CONNECTICUT'S WORKING LANDS.

THE NEED

Connecticut has ambitious climate goals and is making considerable progress reducing regional greenhouse gas emissions through a range of activities. Most recently, increasing the share of renewables in the electric supply, and displacing fossil fuels, is a core part of achieving Connecticut's climate goals. However, the rapid expansion of renewable energy installations across the state has started to compromise CT's best farmland and core forests; part of our green infrastructure that are critical to addressing climate change. This new pressure compounds the severe "competition for land" in Connecticut, underpinning the need to develop smarter solar siting and grid infrastructure as a uniquely flexible tool to combat climate change while reinforcing the conservation of our most precious lands and natural resources.

Land owners across the state are being approached by solar developers to lease or sell farmland for large scale solar arrays, while nearly 30 percent of farmers in the state are dependent on leased land and new and beginning farmers are struggling with land access. If Connecticut is not intentional about solar development on CT's farmland, especially prime and important farmland soils, it risks the future of the state's agricultural sector, including the food, water management, habitat, recreation, and climate mitigation it provides. Smarter solar siting is built upon data driven analyses that consider the inherent trade-offs associated with large scale ground mounted solar, removing unnecessary barriers to solar projects that are in the public interest while providing improved oversight for projects that will have significant community or natural resource impacts.

THE SOLUTION

Connecticut must pass **H.B. 6498 - An Act Concerning the Siting of Solar Facilities on Certain Farmland and Core Forest** during the 2021 legislative session. This piece

of legislation, if passed into law, would ensure that solar developers consider the impacts of solar development on prime and important farmland in an effort for the state to meet it's aggressive renewable energy goals while ensuring the future of our regional food system and the ecosystem services that farmland provides.

FAST FACTS

- According to American Farmland Trust's 2020 *"Farms Under Threat: The State of the States,"* **23,000 acres of Connecticut farmland were converted to urban development or low-density residential land use between 2002 and 2017**, putting Connecticut in the top three states nationally for the percent of farmland developed or compromised. Acadia Center's EnergyVision 2030 projects that **in order to meet 2030 renewable energy targets, the state of CT will need to increase solar generation capacity to more than 4 GW**. This includes almost 2GW of installed ground-mounted solar potentially impacting more than 10,000 acres of land.
- **From January to August of 2020, over 540 acres of Connecticut farmland were targeted for siting solar energy facilities** according to a recent letter by the State of Connecticut's Council on Environmental Quality.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Chelsea Gazillo
American Farmland Trust's New England
Policy Manager - Directing Working Lands
Alliance in Connecticut 707-495-8223 •
workinglandsalliance.org