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MAILBAG: Limits on solar production don't make sense

Nov 23, 2020



The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) of the U.S. Department of Energy has a unit for Agrovoltaics, the combination of solar electric generation with agriculture. This can be as simple as planting wildflowers that attract pollinators (beneficial insects that are necessary for food crops) under solar panels, or as innovative as planting green leafy vegetables that benefit from partial shade — important as climate change makes our summers hotter. Solar panels can even be elevated so that sheep or cattle can graze under them.

A recent article in the Union-Sun & Journal suggested that solar projects should be limited to brownfields rather than farmland. Brownfields and abandoned industrial sites are good venues for solar installations, as New York State's new Office of Renewable Energy Siting recognizes by fast-tracking and preparing sites for utility-scale solar projects. But not all brownfields are suitable for solar installations.

There is a lot of dormant agricultural land in Western New York and many farmers are struggling to stay in business. Instead of selling their land for sprawling rural housing tracts or big warehouses, farmers may decide to lease some of their land for solar, so they can continue farming on the remainder. Solar panels do no harm to the land, which can be returned to agriculture if more cropland is needed. Why should farmers be prevented from using their land for this socially beneficial, non-polluting purpose, when the need to curb climate change and to stop the harm to our health, land and water from the mining, transport and burning of fossil fuel, is urgent.

The writer also complained that the solar project would not be taxed the same as a Popeyes restaurant or a Dollar Store. Energy production is not like a chicken sandwich. Traditional power projects, such as the former Somerset coal-fired generation plant, negotiate Payments in Lieu of Taxes within

government parameters, as their product is energy, not objects for sale, and more complex economically. Fossil fuel production is heavily subsidized and renewable energy should not be penalized.

Niagara County can be a leader again in clean renewable energy, as it was in the early 20th century, and no single form or type of location is sufficient to reach the energy goals that will protect future generations.

ELLEN BANKS, Williamsville

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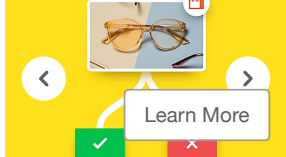
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