

BLUEWAVE

March 16, 2020

Dear Chairs Roae and Matzie,

BlueWave Solar (BlueWave) is a community and public solar developer based in Boston, Massachusetts. We have developed 135MW of community and public solar and manage 160 MW of customers in Massachusetts, New York and Minnesota. BlueWave is also a certified B Corporation, which means we believe in the triple bottom line – we can value people, places, and profit – and that we can do good business by doing good. Because our mission to revolutionize energy is rooted in these values, we have partnered with a number of farmers to help keep their farms viable for the next generation.

We urge the committee to support HB-531 PA Community Solar Access Bill because it will not only launch Pennsylvania into energy independence, but will help stabilize the precarious position that the Commonwealth's farmers find themselves in. Thank you for giving community solar providers, developers, landowners and farmers the opportunity to provide input on Pennsylvania's bright solar future.

Enable Sustainable Solar Development, Empower Pennsylvania's Farmers

In the last two years, 457 farms have been shuttered across the Commonwealth.¹ More specifically, Pennsylvania lost 370 dairy farms in 2018 alone.² Many farmers do not see a viable path for farm succession, so they feel pressure from housing and other permanent forms of development to sell their valuable agricultural land. It is entirely prudent and vitally important that the legislature consider alternatives to bolster farm viability and support new farmers in succession planning, especially as the average age of a farmer in Pennsylvania is 55 years old.³ Farmland does not need to be permanently lost to development in order for farmers to succeed.

Many farmers across the Northeast region are turning to sustainable solar development as a source of revenue that can sustain farm operations for generations. Dual-Use, pioneered by BlueWave and others, means that farmers can continue growing crops or grazing livestock in between or underneath raised solar panels. BlueWave is also working with farmers across Pennsylvania to site standard solar with agricultural siting best practices. These practices guarantee minimal impact to the land during construction, over the life of the project, and after the panels are decommissioned. In fact, using

¹ US Department of Agriculture & National Agricultural Statistics Service 2017 Census of Agriculture – Pennsylvania State Profile & 2019 State Agriculture Overview – Pennsylvania. See www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus for a full data set.

² More than 2,700 U.S. Dairy Farms Closed in 2018 – Dairy Herd Management (April 22, 2019). <https://www.dairyherd.com/article/more-2700-us-dairy-farms-closed-2018>

³ See Footnote 1.

regenerative practices and soil building techniques, solar projects can improve the soil and water retention of the farmland where they are sited.⁴

Preserving Pennsylvania's Farmland for Future Generations

In BlueWave's decade of solar experience, we have seen the revenue from dual use solar projects sustain the active agricultural production of the farm, and in many cases increase and/or diversify production. Land lease payments, property taxes and other improvements to the farm are paid for by the solar developer, enabling farmers to take more measured risks and make investments in their operations that they otherwise would not have been able to do.

One of our Pennsylvania farmers is depending on community solar in order for his family to continue farming for years to come. He is submitting a letter of support for HB 531, attached to our written testimony. His son and daughter-in-law are hopeful that with this new stable revenue stream, they can feel secure in assuming eventual ownership and management of the entire operation. Without solar, the possibility of preserving this family farm would not exist, and the alternative would be to sell the land for housing development. Considering that 98% of farms in Pennsylvania are family farms,⁵ the potential impact of enabling community solar is economically significant for family farms.

In Massachusetts, BlueWave's Grafton project enables the Knowlton family to grow strawberries and pumpkins on their 150-year-old farm. The Knowltons will also be constructing a commercial-scale greenhouse to expand production year-round, and reactivating their 25-year dormant cattle grazing operation (previously deemed too expensive to continue) under a raised rotational grazing Dual-Use solar array. Since there is revenue from the solar lease payment coming into the farm, the daughter now feels secure enough to leave her day job to begin farming full time. In addition, BlueWave made capital improvements like irrigation, ag-tech monitoring devices, and is hiring a farm manager for the life of the project to serve as go-between for the solar project owner, farmer, and state agencies.

A Clean Energy Future for Pennsylvania

This Committee has a unique opportunity to underscore its support of farming and clean energy in one swift action by supporting HB-531 PA Community Solar Access Bill. We urge you to empower our farming communities and young farmers in particular with the tools to preserve agricultural production and farmland across the Commonwealth. Thank you for your consideration and leadership etc.

Lucy Bullock-Sieger
Director of Civic Engagement
BlueWave Solar

⁴ Remarkable agrivoltaic influence on soil moisture, micrometeorology and water-use efficiency. Adeb, Selker, & Higgins. PLOS One. <https://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203256>

⁵ See Footnote 1.

