

Food prices have been in the news everyday since 2020 unfortunately most of the media coverage misses the forests for the trees because a major driver of food prices is often ignored. Climate change! Helene affected more than 6 million acres of agricultural land, property that collectively produces an estimated \$8.7 billion in agricultural products. In early 2024 TX experienced a horrific wildfire, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service economists reported that more than 12,000 cattle deaths occurred, contributing to an estimated \$123 million in agricultural losses. These are the type of losses that happen over a weekend due to climate change and they are just the tip of the iceberg but media coverage of this issue is almost nonexistent.

How does this relate to solar farms? Approximately 1.25 million acres of agricultural land in the United States have been converted for use in *solar energy production*. This figure is based on data from the USDA and American Farmland Trust, which found that 83% of solar installations are on agricultural land, including cropland and pasture or rangeland. This highlights a strong tendency to develop solar projects on land that is typically used for agricultural purposes due to its favorable characteristics—flat, sunny, and relatively inexpensive to lease. We're losing crops and livestock due to climate change, which decreases supply and increases cost and now the offered solution is causing more losses which will further decrease supply and increase cost. Fortunately, this isn't the way it has to be. We can easily start land management practices that promote policies and incentives to encourage solar development on less fertile land, brownfields, industrial rooftops, parking lots, and agrivoltaics to reduce the impact on agricultural productivity, food security, and inflation.

Appropriate land use and food security considerations are often underrepresented in the climate activism discourse, particularly when it comes to renewable energy development like solar and wind farms. While renewable energy expansion is critical for reducing carbon emissions, the broader impacts on agricultural productivity, rural communities, and land use should be given more weight in the conversation. More coordinated planning and policy interventions are needed to ensure that solar installations do not compromise agricultural productivity, especially given the increasing threat of climate change to food security. Supporting and expanding incentives for agrivoltaics, along with stricter regulations regarding the use of prime farmland, will help balance renewable energy goals with the need to protect valuable agricultural resources.

We need regulation to ensure that the solutions to climate change aren't adding to inflating food prices. The current approach of simply acquiring farmland for solar farms and transmission lines needs to be rethought in the context of food security and climate resilience. Instead of a "one-or-the-other" mindset, we should focus on multi-use strategies like agrivoltaics, prioritize non-arable or marginal lands, and promote solar development in urban and industrial areas. With climate change threatening both energy and food systems, a more integrated, strategic approach is essential. Allowing the Public Service Commission to overstep local regulations is not a solution, it's a policy that widens the rural/urban divide. Rural areas are experiencing most if not all impacts for solar and transmission lines, and the urban areas seem to be promoting renewables the most without putting any skin in the game. There are easily 100 acres of flat warehouse rooftops in one area of Sparrows Point, without solar panels. This is a missed opportunity and unfortunately the strategy of "go get some farmland" needs to be rethought.

Respectfully,  
Jeremy and Brenda Myers