

Solar power still offers a silver bullet to economic growth

• 05/06/2020

Many regions and counties had hoped and planned to see steady economic growth in the next few years. As recently as two months ago, new industrial plants, shopping centers and residential subdivisions in designated pockets throughout their county seemed within reach and with it the resulting tax income to offer continued services to local residents.

COVID-19 has dramatically changed that paradigm; most counties now face economic challenges for years ahead. Not only has the expected economic growth evaporated, many existing businesses will pay vastly reduced tax contributions due to the economic slow-down caused by the pandemic. All this just when the demand for services, from elderly care, to hospitals, emergency services, mental health and employment challenges are increasing.



Agricultural use like this cotton farm brought in very little tax revenue, the new solar farm on the site will contribute more than 15x to the local tax base.

With a likely recession, the like of which we have not known for nearly 100 years, and the associated uncertainty ahead, is there a route to continue economic development and increase the local tax base? I believe solar projects can be a solution. Solar projects offer long term stable income and tax contributions. The demand for electricity is unlikely to wane and consumers prefer the clean kind offered by solar and wind over any other kind. Moreover, solar is quick to deploy and can start adding local income in a matter of months.

Many families who farm land around the country have an opportunity to stabilize their incomes through harvesting energy on some of their fields that usually produce corn, soybeans, and other crops. The resulting income stability allows them to continue farming and maintaining open space on the remainder of their property. Importantly, providing these families with a substantial

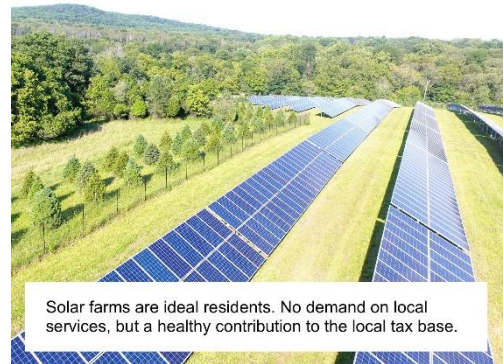
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Many families who farm land around the country have an opportunity to stabilize their incomes through harvesting energy on some of their fields that usually produce corn, soybeans, and other crops. The resulting income stability allows them to continue farming and maintaining open space on the remainder of their property. Importantly, providing these families with a substantial dependable rental income from the solar farm, will mean local disposable income, supporting many other local businesses from the flower shop to the car dealership.

Unfortunately, solar plans often meet rejection locally. One reason being that Comprehensive Plans drawn up before the current crisis, and sometimes before solar became mainstream, say that the land could be developed into industrial or residential projects. These developments are now unlikely for years to come. Without the hoped for economic development land will remain agricultural and it will generate only a fraction of the tax revenue over 35 years compared to the tax that the same land would generate if a solar farm were permitted. In many cases solar will deliver over fifteen

times more tax revenue! A solar project would also create jobs and reduce the environmental impact on the local watershed from farm runoffs. Lowering nitrate and manure pollution in our rivers would save hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars currently dedicated to nitrate mitigation.



Solar farms are ideal residents. No demand on local services, but a healthy contribution to the local tax base.

With the likelihood of significant industrial or residential investment at near zero, it is pertinent for counties to seek out opportunities to increase the local tax base with a stable and benign 'industry'. Solar energy is such a silver bullet. It does not draw resources from the county, it enhances the environment, and will continue to do so, silently without pollution or complaint for years to come. All this time it will provide more than 15x the tax that could otherwise be expected from agriculture and puts money in the pockets of local landowners. Money that they will likely spend locally, creating a virtuous circle of positive effect.

It is time to move ahead with permitting solar projects expeditiously, to provide the financial life blood needed to run local services. It is time to be bold, to embrace solar development and the financial benefits it brings. If in 35- or 40-years' time, solar turns out to be the wrong decision, it is easily removed, turning back the land to whatever better use there might be at that time.
