

# Protecting Future Farmland Act

*Sponsored by Senators Baldwin & Grassley*

**Endorsed by American Farmland Trust, American Soybean Association, the Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Farmers Union, and Wisconsin Soybean Growers.**

Federal investment and market drivers are leading to rapid deployment of renewable energy, including solar, and deployment of these technologies often takes place in rural communities. Farmers and ranchers are pressing for improved land stewardship and responsible deployment of renewable energy. The Protecting Future Farmland Act ensures that federal investment in rural energy projects prioritizes both of these practices and directs USDA to put forth best practices for farmland management and protection during solar energy development.

## **Current challenge:**

- Agricultural land and land favorable for solar coincide because agricultural land often has existing connections to the electric grid, access roads, and relatively flat ground.
- About 83% of new solar projects are installed on farmland and ranchlands, with almost 50% placed on the most productive, versatile, and resilient land.
- Currently, there is not a coordinated federal strategy for land management below solar arrays. As such, many farmers and landowners are concerned about the quality of agricultural land after a solar lease ends, as well as the impact of energy installations on soil and water quality.

## **The Protecting Future Farmland Act:**

- Prioritizes federal assistance to large scale renewable energy projects through USDA's Rural Energy for America Program that have in place soil, water, and vegetation management and conservation plans.
- Collects data on conversion of farmland to solar energy and requires a report to Congress on the ways to maximize protection of prime agricultural land and renewable energy deployment.
- Authorizes the National Resources Conservation Service to develop best practices for protection of soil health and productivity during the siting, construction, operation, and decommissioning of solar energy systems on agricultural land.
- Authorizes the National Resources Conservation Service to provide technical assistance to farmers growing crops or managing grazing below or in tandem with solar energy systems.
- Sets a definition for agrivoltaic systems and authorizes USDA to conduct a study on agrivoltaic systems including compatibility and risk-benefit analyses. Agrivoltaics, the co-location of agricultural production (crop production, livestock grazing, and pollinator habitat) with solar energy infrastructure, has the potential to reduce land-use conflicts and provide additional benefits to farmers, rural communities, and the solar industry.

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