Policy Approaches for Dual-Use and Agrisolar Practices

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INTRODUCTION

As demand for clean energy increases, solar deployment is expected to rise. Because utility-scale solar requires considerable land use, many state and local governments are prudently discussing the impact future solar development will have on agricultural lands. The practice of dual-use solar, which refers to allowing two uses to be accomplished in the same space, can address concerns about solar on agricultural land.[1]

Agrisolar, also called agrivoltaics, is the co-location of agriculture and solar within the landscape. It includes solar co-located with crops, grazing, beekeeping, pollinator habitat, aquaculture, and farm or dairy processing. In addition to photovoltaics, it also includes concentrated solar installations.[2] The practice of combining agriculture and solar energy systems can provide numerous economic and environmental benefits. This includes improving economic viability for landowners and agricultural entities, providing beneficial ecological services, and expanding siting

1 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019, Accessed March 2023.
2 Personal communication, Stacie Peterson, Energy Program Director, National Center for Appropriate Technology, March 2023.

opportunities for solar deployment.[3]

The purpose of this report is to provide decision makers and others an overview of policy approaches to combining solar with agriculture and offer considerations on how regulations can facilitate dual-use.

First, we will look at land use and solar, examining the impact expected by the rapid increase of solar development in the near future, and the varying level of responses occurring around clean energy siting regulations and guidance. Next, we will explore the types of dual-use applications and the benefits associated with them, and then move into an overview of policy mechanisms at the federal, state, and local levels that facilitate dual-use. Lastly, we will take a closer look at how local governments have the most impact on solar development, and offer considerations for decision-makers who are interested in creating ordinances or incentives around dual-use.

LAND USE AND SOLAR

How Much Land Will Be Needed?

As the U.S. moves toward setting ambitious decarbonization goals, solar energy is forecasted to grow considerably. Based on solar deployment scenarios by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), ground-based solar technologies may require a land area equivalent to 0.5% of the contiguous U.S. However, it is estimated that this requirement could be met using less than 10% of already disturbed or contaminated lands.[4]

By county, it does not appear that current or planned solar projects would require significant land allocation as a proportion of local area. In an analysis of all counties in the contiguous U.S., the Great Plains Institute found that existing solar development comprises on average 0.04% of land per county and that if all proposed solar projects were built, development would average 0.22% of land per county. As of 2021, no county in the U.S. had more than 4% of total county area in solar development. In contrast, cultivated lands comprise up to 75% of the total county area in much of the central Midwest.[5]

Some state and local governments have created restrictions around using farmland for solar development. However, clean energy development does not appear to pose an immediate threat to the availability of farmland. As of 2022, Iowa had 30.6 million acres of farmland, about 17.5 million of which meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) definition of "prime."[6] [7] If all of the 2,290 MW of proposed solar projects in Iowa were sited on prime farmland, it would use only 0.11% of prime farmland in the state.[8]
According to Minnesota Solar Pathways, powering 70% of Minnesota's electrical load by 2050 would require adding 22 gigawatts of solar,

3 Macknick, Jordan, et al. "The 5 Cs of Agrivoltaic Success Factors in the United States: Lessons From the InSPIRE Research Study." National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

4 "Solar Futures Study Fact Sheet." U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, September 2021. Accessed March 2023

5 Wyatt, Jessi, and Maggie Kristian. "The True Land Footprint of Solar Energy." Great Plains Institute for Sustainable Development, Sept. 14, 2021. Accessed March 2023.

6 "Prime Farmland Definition." Natural Resources Conservation Service, March 2015. Accessed March 2023

7 "Iowa Solar and Agriculture Fact Sheet." Clean Grid Alliance. Accessed March 2023.

8 Ibid.

which would use 220,000 acres of land. Even if all of this solar were to be sited exclusively on prime farmland, it would still only use 1.32% of prime farmland in the state.[9]

Alternatives to Land-use Restrictions

Even though the land needed for solar development is proportionally low, many state and local governments have enacted or are considering enacting restrictions on clean energy development on farmland. In Iowa, some counties have considered using Corn Suitability Ratings (CSR) to restrict development,[10] [11] and state legislators have introduced bills prohibiting solar development on farmland.[12] [13] [14]

In Minnesota, the Public Utilities Commission's administrative rules restrict large electric generation plants from being located on prime farmland.[15] In Midwest states where a large percentage of the land qualifies as farmland, blanket restrictions such as these can severely impact opportunities for clean energy development.

However, some organizations concerned about the land use impacts of clean energy development have developed siting guidance that mitigates impacts to sensitive areas. For example, the American Farmland Trust, an organization dedicated to the preservation of farmland, has created a series of Smart Solar principles, which they believe meet three goals: accelerate solar energy development, strengthen farm viability, and safeguard land well-suited for farming and ranching.[16]

These principles include:[17]

Prioritize solar siting on buildings and land not well suited for farming

Including buildings, irrigation ditches, brownfields or other marginal lands.

Safeguard the ability for land to be used for agriculture

If developed on farm or ranch land, policies and practices should protect soil health, especially during construction and decommissioning.

Grow agrivoltaics for agricultural production and solar energy

Agrivoltaics sustain agricultural production under/between the solar panels.

Promote equity and farm viability

Farmers and underserved communities

9 "Minnesota Solar and Agriculture." Clean Grid Alliance. Accessed March 2023.
10 Whiskeyman, Danny. "Scott County Board of Supervisors approves new solar ordinance." KWQC, Sept. 20, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
11 Klotzbach, John. "County Considering Wind Turbine Ordinance Changes." Independence Bulletin Journal, Sept. 6, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
12 "Senate Study Bill 1077." Iowa Legislature, Jan. 24, 2023. Accessed March 2023.
13 "Senate File 2127." Iowa Legislature, Jan. 26, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
14 "Senate File 2321." Iowa Legislature, Feb. 17, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
15 "Minnesota Administrative Rules." Minnesota Legislature, Sept. 18, 2009. Accessed March 2023.
16 Sallet, Lori. "Growing Renewable Energy While Strengthening Farm Viability and Safeguarding Healthy Soil." American Farmland Trust, Sept. 22. 2022. Accessed March 2023.
17 Ibid.

should benefit from solar development and should be included in stakeholder engagement processes.

This type of siting guidance offers a more nuanced approach to clean energy development. By taking a wider array of factors into consideration, including economic impacts and dual usage, this approach demonstrates that clean energy siting does not require an either/or mindset.

Through thoughtful planning, local decision makers can craft policies that respect the property rights of local landowners and allow them to take advantage of opportunities to diversify their income, while at the same time encouraging dual-use practices that preserve the agricultural values of the local community.

TYPES OF DUAL-USE

There are several types of dual-use practices that can be combined with solar energy sites including cultivating different types of crops such as vegetables and berries, utilizing livestock grazing for managing vegetation, beekeeping, and planting native vegetation and pollinator habitat. These practices can create environmental and economic benefits such as new revenue streams for local farmers, increased pollinators, wildlife habitat, enhanced soil health, reduced erosion, and carbon storage. These projects are not mutually exclusive, however, and multiple activities can occur simultaneously, or at different times of the year.[18]

Crops

A variety of agricultural crops can be grown in co-location with solar installations, including fruit, vegetables, and berries. Any crops that are successful in a region are likely to be suitable for co-location with solar projects. Crops can be grown under the panels, between rows, or outside the perimeter of the installation. Panel height, spacing, water access, equipment needs, and whether the system is fixed or tracking, all will play a role in the success of integrating specific types of crop production into a solar installation. Research is ongoing to better understand the performance and feasibility of co-locating crops with solar energy systems.[19] [20]

Iowa State University recently announced it will kick off a $1.8 million, four-year research project on dual-use and food crop production.[21] Similar food crop-focused research is ongoing through the Sustainably Colocating Agricultural and Photovoltaic Electricity Systems (SCAPES) projects at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of Arizona, Colorado State University, Auburn University, and

18 Macknick, Jordan, et al. "The 5 Cs of Agrivoltaic Success Factors in the United States: Lessons From the InSPIRE Research Study." National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

19 "Suitable Agricultural Activities for Low-Impact Solar Development." InSPIRE, Aug. 11, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

20 Macknick, Jordan, et al. "The 5 Cs of Agrivoltaic Success Factors in the United States: Lessons From the InSPIRE Research Study." National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

21 "ISU researchers to study growing crops in solar farm's footprint." Iowa State University, Feb. 15, 2023. Accessed March 2023.

University of Chicago. [22]

Outside of food crops, researchers are also looking into whether more traditional row crops can be co-located with solar installations. For example, Purdue University is conducting field trials combining traditional crops like corn and soy with raised solar panels.[23]

Grazing

Solar grazing is the utilization of livestock, usually sheep, to manage vegetation at solar sites. It takes the place of traditional mowing and offers both environmental and financial benefits. For project developers, contracting with local farmers to use solar grazing as a management tool can reduce operations and maintenance costs. Solar grazing can offer local livestock owners additional pasture opportunities and the opportunity to be paid for a valuable service, increasing income to their business and adding to the economy of the rural communities where these projects are usually located.[24]

Beekeeping

Solar beekeeping is the practice of placing beehives on or near solar sites that have been planted in native vegetation or other pollinator habitats. Solar beekeeping can offer new revenue streams for local beekeepers, as well as the opportunity to gain resiliency from a diverse source of pollen for honey production.

Additionally, the landowner sees a positive impact from improved soil health, and nearby farmers profit from pollination services.[25] Pollinators are critical to crop production, with the USDA estimating that wild and managed bees together add $15 billion in crop value each year.[26] An Argonne National Laboratory case study found that the value of pollinator habitat on U.S. lands designated as proposed or potential solar sites is between $1.5 billion and $3.2 billion.[27]

Native Vegetation and Pollinator-Friendly Solar

Sites with native or naturalized, non-invasive, flowering vegetation are commonly referred to as "pollinator-friendly solar sites." Pollinator-

22 Harwood, Lori. "UArizona Partners on $10M USDA Grant to Expand Research on Growing Crops Under Solar Panels." University of Arizona, Oct. 6, 2021. Accessed March 2023.
23 Bowman, Sarah, et al. "Can solar panels and row crops coexist on farmland across the skeptical Corn Belt?" Indy Star, Sept. 13, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
24 "Fact Sheet: Making the Case for Solar Grazing." Center for Rural Affairs, Dec. 20, 2021. Accessed March 2023.
25 "Fact Sheet: Making the Case for Solar Beekeeping." Center for Rural Affairs, Dec. 22, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
26 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
27 "Case Study: Economics of Pollinator Habitats at Solar Facilities." Argonne National Laboratory. Accessed March 2023.

friendly solar project sites offer habitat for honey bees, native bees, and other species of pollinators, all of which can positively benefit local agricultural production. Using native or pollinator-friendly vegetation provides numerous benefits, including reduced erosion, improved water quality and soil health, and increased habitat for wildlife. It can also reduce long-term operation and maintenance costs for project developers and site managers.[28]

Determining the appropriate types of dual-use projects most likely to be successful at a specific site can be daunting. However, research is ongoing to understand the components needed for successful deployment and operation of agrisolar projects. From 2015 to 2021, the Innovative Solar Practices Integrated with Rural Economies and Ecosystems (InSPIRE) project studied field research sites and identified five key elements that enable success. These elements were explored in the report *"The 5 C's of Agrivoltaic Success Factors in the United States: Lessons from the InSPIRE Research Study."* They include:[29]

Climate, soil, and environmental conditions
The ambient conditions and factors of the specific location that are beyond the control of the solar owners, solar operators, agrivoltaic practitioners, and researchers.

Configurations, solar technologies, and designs
The choice of solar technology, the site layout, and other infrastructure that can affect light availability and solar generation.

Crop selection and cultivation methods, seed and vegetation designs, and management approaches
The methods, vegetation, and agricultural approaches used for agrivoltaic activities and research.

Compatibility and flexibility
The compatibility of the solar technology design and configuration with the competing needs of the solar owners, solar operators, agricultural practitioners, and researchers.

Collaboration and partnerships
Understandings and agreements made across stakeholders and sectors to support agrivoltaic installations and research, including community engagement, permitting, and legal agreements.

POLICY APPROACHES TO DUAL-USE

Policies at the federal, state, and local levels of government can influence the implementation of dual-use solar. These policies interact, but overall, local land-use policies have been shown to be the most significant catalyst or inhibitor of agrisolar development.[30]

We will be looking at a variety of policy approaches at each level of government, including tax incentives, land use laws, renewable portfolio standards, and others.

28 Smith, Cody. "Amplifying Clean Energy with Conservation, Part One: Pollinator-Friendly Solar." Center for Rural Affairs, October 2020. Accessed March 2023.
29 Macknick, Jordan, et al. "The 5 Cs of Agrivoltaic Success Factors in the United States: Lessons From the InSPIRE Research Study." National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
30 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.

Federal

Because land use decisions are typically made at the local level, the role of federal policy in encouraging or discouraging dual-use applications is limited. However, two primary incentives exist for solar development—the Business Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC) and USDA's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). Additionally, federal investments in dual-use can help bolster the practice.

Tax incentives

The ITC is the sole corporate tax credit available for solar. The tax credit does not include any restrictions that would disallow solar on specific locations, making it acceptable for combination with dual-use.[31]

Land-use laws

Authority over land use in the U.S. is held by state and local governments.[32]

Portfolio standards

Renewable portfolio standards are policies that require electricity suppliers to provide customers with a stated amount of electricity from renewable sources. Although the idea of a federal renewable portfolio standard has been proposed, no such policy currently exists.[33]

Other

REAP grants and loan guarantees offer financial assistance to agricultural producers and small businesses for energy improvements or investments. This can include construction of solar energy systems and does not present conflicts with dual-use integration.[34]

In 2022, DOE announced an $8 million investment in agrivoltaic research projects. The

Foundational Agrivoltaic Research for Megawatt Scale-funding program is aimed at developing best practices, seeking replicable models, providing new economic opportunities, and reducing land-use conflicts.[35] In 2022, USDA's Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities awarded the University of Arizona $4.7 million[36] and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley $2.2 million[37] for agrivoltaic research projects.

State

State policy approaches to dual-use include tax and other financial incentives, state-level land-use laws, renewable portfolio standards, and pollinator scorecards. State-level policies interact with local decision making in ways that can either enable or restrict local governments from enacting certain practices or policies.

Tax incentives

States can incentivize solar dual-use practices through land use taxes. If landowners are able to integrate solar development into their farming operation without a land-use tax change, they may be more receptive to the development. For example, Rhode Island has amended its Farm,

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 "Renewable energy explained: Portfolio standards." U.S. Energy Information Administration, November 30, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
34 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.

35 "DOE Announces $8 Million to Integrate Solar Energy Production with Farming." U.S. Department of Energy, Dec. 8, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
36 "Media Advisory: USDA awards over $4.7M to support and promote 'climate-smart' food production." University of Arizona, Dec. 19, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
37 Gonzalez, Maria. "UTRGV receives $2.2M grant for 'Climate-Smart' Commodities project." University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Dec. 12, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

Forest, and Open Space Land law to exempt landowners from a land-use change tax if they are integrating a dual-use renewable energy generation system, which is defined as a wind or solar system that allows agricultural practices to continue around it under normal practices.[38] [39]

Similarly, in 2021, New Jersey enacted a Dual-Use Solar Law, which provides an incentive for keeping land at solar sites in agricultural production. The law established a pilot program allowing unpreserved farmland used for dual-use solar projects to be eligible for farmland assessment under certain conditions.[40]

The AgriSolar Clearinghouse maintains an interactive map detailing dual-use financial incentives throughout the United States, including potential funding sources, assistance programs, utility incentives, and tax breaks. It can be found at: agrisolarclearinghouse.org/financial-information-map.

Land-use laws

State-level land use laws can significantly impact where solar development can happen. For example, Illinois' Agricultural Areas Conservation & Protection Act creates land areas where only agricultural production is allowed.[41]

As dual-use has evolved, debates about whether implementation of these practices at solar sites should qualify as agricultural land use are ongoing. One practice states can employ to help facilitate dual-use at solar sites is to review land use planning goals and definitions of solar generation, farmland, and farm uses to ensure they do not preclude dual-use solar.[42]

Some states have created statewide siting standards to regulate clean energy development. For example, in early 2023, lawmakers in Illinois passed House Bill 4412, which dictates statewide setbacks for wind and solar development.[43] Alternative approaches, such as the creation of state-specific best practices, model ordinances, or voluntary siting matrices offer ways to preserve local control while also providing helpful guidelines for local decision makers.[44] [45]

38 "Rules and Regulations for Enforcement of the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act." Rhode Island Department of State. Accessed March 2023.
39 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
40 "Chapter 170." New Jersey Legislature, 2021. Accessed March 2023.
41 Guarino, Jessica, and Tyler Swanson. "The Illinois Agrivoltaics Regulatory and Policy Guide Analyzes State and Local Laws." AgriSolar Clearinghouse, Feb. 1, 2023. Accessed March 2023.
42 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
43 Moore, Brenden. "New Illinois state energy project standards welcomed by some, resisted by others." The Pantagraph, February 11, 2023. Accessed March 2023
44 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
45 Mouw, Lindsay. "Exploring Siting Guidance: Agriculture Siting Matrices Inform Renewable Energy Siting." Center for Rural Affairs, July 2022. Accessed March 2023.

Portfolio standards

As of 2021, 31 states and the District of Columbia had adopted renewable portfolio standards or clean energy goals.[46] Within these standards, "carve out" provisions can be used to encourage the adoption of certain technologies, such as solar and dual-use. As of 2021, 21 states had solar carve-out provisions in their renewable portfolio standards. Massachusetts' SMART program is one example of such a renewable portfolio standard that also incorporates incentives for dual-use.[47]

Other

Under the Massachusetts Department of Energy's Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program, specific kinds of dual-use solar systems, known as Agricultural Solar Tariff Generation Units (ASTGU), can qualify for financial incentives. To qualify, the land under the solar system must be in continuous agricultural production. The SMART program offers a base cents-per-kilowatt-hour compensation rate for new solar arrays. Systems using these practices that qualify as an ASTGU receive an additional 6 cents per kilowatt-hour to the base rate.[48] [49] [50]

Many states across the U.S. have created policies or programs to encourage or require implementation of pollinator habitat at solar

sites. These initiatives can vary widely in their structure and implementation. One tool is a pollinator scorecard, which provides a model to score pollinator-friendly practices. This score can be used to gauge if a site meets state or local requirements, to designate a site as pollinator-friendly, or to determine if a site qualifies for other types of incentives.[51]

For example, Minnesota state code (§216B.1642)[52] authorizes the Board of Soil and Water Resources to establish statewide guidance for solar project developers aiming for recognition under the Habitat Friendly Solar Program. The statute reads, "...an owner of a solar site implementing solar site management practices may claim that the site provides benefits to gamebirds, songbirds, and pollinators only if the site adheres to guidance set forth by the pollinator plan provided by the Board of Water and Soil Resources."[53] [54]

Local

Local land-use policy is the key leverage point

46 Bowers, Richard. "Five states updated or adopted new clean energy standards in 2021." U.S. Energy Information Administration, February 1, 2022. Accessed March 2023.
47 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.
48 "Dual-Use: Agriculture and Solar Photovoltaics." University of Massachusetts Amherst. Accessed March 2023.
49 "Guideline Regarding the Definition of Agricultural Solar Tariff Generation Units." Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Department of Energy Resources, Department of Agricultural Resources, April 26, 2018. Accessed March 2023.
50 "SMART Program Incentives for Solar Arrays." University of Massachusetts Amherst. Accessed March 2023.
51 "Pollinator-Friendly Solar Scorecards." Fresh Energy. Accessed March 2023.
52 "2019 Minnesota Statutes." Office of the Revisor of Statutes, Minnesota Legislature. Accessed March 2023.
53 "Minnesota Habitat Friendly Solar Program." Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
54 Smith, Cody. "Amplifying Clean Energy with Conservation, Part One: Pollinator-Friendly Solar." October 2020. Accessed March 2023.

for enabling development on land suitable for combining agriculture and solar energy production.[55] This is because local governments usually have the most influence over land use, including the ability to regulate zoning and develop siting ordinances that dictate how and where development can occur. Tax incentives and renewable portfolio standards are seen more in state-level policy.

Tax incentives

Local governments have the ability to create tax incentives, though these are more common in state-level policy.

Land-use laws

Land-use laws are the primary lever for local governments to facilitate dual-use. However, despite rapid expansion of solar energy development, many local governments have not addressed siting in their ordinances. In a review of local-level policies in Illinois, researchers found that many counties had no solar siting ordinance on the books, and the counties that did represented drastically different approaches to zoning and land-use policy.[56] As of 2020, only 19% of zoning ordinances in Michigan addressed utility-scale solar siting.[57] When counties lack an ordinance, it can create uncertainty for decision makers and developers, who won't know if the land use is permitted or prohibited.[58]

Solar siting often depends on the county's comprehensive land-use plans and resulting zoning and siting ordinances. When developing ordinances, local decision makers often use the county's land-use planning goals to help guide the process. For example, in Buchanan County, Iowa, county supervisors cited language in their comprehensive land-use plan about preserving agricultural lands with highly productive soils to propose a restriction on clean energy development on lands with high CSR.[59] Expressing similar concern, Scott County, Iowa passed an ordinance restricting solar development on lands with high CSR.[60] [61]

Conversely, some counties have identified renewable energy development as a priority within their comprehensive land-use plan. Linn County, Iowa's comprehensive plan contains a section on renewable energy, which identifies an objective to "encourage development of local alternative and renewable energy resources through identification and removal of regulatory

55 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.

56 Guarino, Jessica, and Tyler Swanson. "The Illinois Agrivoltaics Regulatory and Policy Guide Analyzes State and Local Laws." AgriSolar Clearinghouse, Feb. 1, 2023. Accessed March 2023.

57 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.

58 Ibid.

59 Klotzbach, John. "County Considering Wind Turbine Ordinance Changes." Independence Bulletin Journal, Sept. 6, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

60 "Scott County Ordinance NO. 22 -04." Scott County, Iowa, Sept. 15, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

61 Whiskeyman, Danny. "Scott County Board of Supervisors approves new solar ordinance." KWQC, Sept. 20, 2022. Accessed March 2023.

barriers."[62]

Additionally, local governments can adopt siting ordinances that dictate specific dual-use management practices at solar sites. For example, ordinances can require sites to be planted in native vegetation or pollinator habitat, or to be maintained by livestock grazing.

Portfolio standards

Both municipalities and utilities have the ability to set their own renewable electricity goals.

Other

Community agrisolar projects can improve local buy-in by providing an opportunity for community members to become shareholders.[63]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOCAL DECISION MAKERS: HOW ORDINANCES CAN FACILITATE DUAL-USE

Decision makers who want to facilitate the combination of clean energy development and agriculture should consider the following topics when engaging in the ordinance development or amendment process:

Land-use Planning

Comprehensive land-use plans are commonly used by counties to help guide development. These plans reflect the values and vision of the community and, in rural areas, they often contain language relating to the preservation of agricultural heritage and farmland. The way this language is interpreted varies widely between counties, and some decision makers may have difficulty interpreting how language around agricultural resource protection relates to dual-use.[64]

Implementation of dual-use practices can provide an alternative to an either/or mindset relating to agriculture and clean energy development, as they allow land to stay in agricultural use. Combining livestock grazing, crop production, and other endeavors with solar sites preserves the agricultural roots of rural communities while also allowing landowners and counties to take advantage of the environmental and economic benefits of clean energy development.

Including renewable-energy development within the county's comprehensive plan can ensure the economic benefits of this development are taken into consideration when ordinances are created or amended in the future. Clean energy can benefit counties in the form of increased tax revenues, lease payments to local landowners, and job creation. Combining this development with dual-use can offer increased environmental benefits and provide new revenue streams for local farmers.

Zoning and Siting Regulations

Local decision makers can ensure that development is done in a way that meets the needs of the community by engaging in a proactive ordinance development process. By taking the time to create an ordinance before development has been proposed, decision makers can ensure there is time to receive

62 "Linn County Comprehensive Plan: Volume 1." Linn County, Iowa, July 19, 2013. Accessed March 2023.
63 Brunswick, Sarah, and Danika Marzillier. "The New Solar Farms: Growing a Fertile Policy Environment for Agrivoltaics." Minnesota Journal of Law, Science & Technology, March 4, 2023. Accessed March 2023.

64 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.

community input and feedback on proposed language. Additionally, considerations can be made about setting additional land use expectations, such as dual use.

Counties wanting to enable dual-use integration should consider zoning schemes that allow for mixed land usage. This could include overlay districts, which would allow a special permit for solar in certain zones, or allowing development when certain land use standards are met, such placing a certain percentage of land into pollinator habitat.[65]

Siting regulations should be carefully crafted to ensure they don't restrict dual-use. For example, setting restrictions on panel height or developing overly prescriptive vegetation management requirements can limit dual-use opportunities.

Definitions

When creating definitions within zoning and siting regulations, local governments can ensure they do not preclude dual-use solar. This could include refining definitions for solar generation, farmland, and farm uses to ensure compatibility with desired dual-use practices.[66]

It is also important to determine wich applications and practices will be considered dual-use. For example, in Oregon, a rule was adopted allowing for dual-use practices on high-value soils. However, the rule only specifies agrivoltaics and grazing, meaning pollinator habitats or other conservation dual-use do not qualify.[67]

Interaction of Dual-use Goals

When creating policies, it is especially important to carefully consider how the dual-usage goals interact. Certain requirements may unintentionally restrict beneficial practices. For example, native vegetation or pollinator-friendly habitat requirements may unintentionally limit grazing opportunities if plants on the site are not suitable. In the same vein, to meet pollinator requirements vegetation must be allowed to bloom to ensure it is actually benefiting pollinators, requiring grazing schedules be modified to accommodate bloom times.[68]

It is wise to consider that 100% of land may not be able to be integrated into dual-use. Setting overly strict guidance could deter development if prescriptions are not feasible. Instead, requiring a percentage of land to be used for dual-use purposes introduces a level of flexibility while ensuring that the original intent of the usage policy is preserved.

Site Construction, Decommissioning, and Restoration

Although not directly related to dual-use, local governments can use ordinances to minimize land impacts during the construction and decommissioning of solar systems.

Solar projects generally have minimal impact on land quality, and land can be returned to farming at the end of the project's life cycle, if desired. However, being clear about how land will be

65 Pascaris, Alexis S. "Examining existing policy to inform a comprehensive legal framework for agrivoltaics in the U.S." Energy Policy, December 2021. Accessed March 2023.
66 Marieb, Dugan. "Dual-use Solar in the Pacific Northwest: A Way Forward." Renewable Northwest, 2019. Accessed March 2023.
67 Ibid.

68 "Fact Sheet: Making the Case for Solar Grazing." Center for Rural Affairs, Dec. 20, 2021. Accessed March 2023.

managed during construction as well as once a project is decommissioned can help protect land quality. Local governments can set requirements for construction, vegetation management, and decommissioning that spell out the expectations and obligations. This can also include requiring financial guarantees to ensure funds are available for decommissioning purposes and that local governments are not responsible for costs.[69]

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Solar development is expected to rise significantly in the coming years. Although deployment models reflect that will require a large amount of land, it is expected it will require 0.5% of land in the contiguous U.S. and, in many cases, can be placed on already disturbed or marginal lands. Even if all proposed projects in Minnesota and Iowa were sited on prime farmland, it would only represent 1.32% and 0.11% of all prime land in those states, respectively.

Clean energy and agriculture do not require an either/or approach. Through thoughtful planning, local decision makers can craft policies that respect the property rights of local landowners and allow them to take advantage of opportunities to diversify their income, while at the same time encouraging dual-use and agrisolar practices that preserve the agricultural values of the local community.

Dual-use and agrisolar practices can include cultivating crops, utilizing livestock grazing, beekeeping, and planting native vegetation and pollinator habitat. These practices can create a variety of environmental and economic benefits, such as new revenue streams for local farmers, increased

pollinators, wildlife habitat, and soil health, reduced erosion, and carbon storage.

Policies exist at the federal, state, and local levels of government that can influence the implementation of dual-use solar and agrivoltiacs. These policies interact but overall, local land-use policies have the most significant role in impacting solar and agrivoltaic development.

By engaging in a proactive ordinance development process, local decision makers can ensure that development is done in a way that meets the needs of their community. Creating an ordinance in advance of development ensures there is time to receive community input and feedback on the proposed language.

69 Kolbeck-Urlacher, Heidi. "Decommissioning Solar Energy Systems Resource Guide." Center for Rural Affairs, June 2022. Accessed March 2023.

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