News Release

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You can hardly pick up a newspaper or watch a news show without reading something about the environment or the ominous question, how are we going to feed nine billion people. You will hear such buzz words as greenhouse gases, carbon sequestration or green energy. Then there is the seeming contradiction that is the solar “farm” that is springing up along Roxbury Road and the Sharpsburg Pike.

Am I against solar energy, not at all, I think it has its place but certainly not taking up cropland or when it is so one dimensional. The acres now covered with low slung PV panels were once instead pushing up crops such as oats, corn and soybeans. They were cultivated by a common practice known as no-till with occasional tillage.

Both practices have been shown to sequester carbon in the form of soil organic matter. Will a permanent sod under the panels sequester carbon? Maybe but will that vegetation capture the sun’s energy and produce food of any kind.

To add insult to injury I read two articles recently involving grazing sheep under solar panels.

Imagine my dismay reading this headline, “Solar farm to share 80-acre site with sheep”. Is the
site in Washington County? Maryland? Or even the United States? Sadly no, quoting from the Cambridge News, “Energy developer TGC Renewables has submitted a planning application to create the site on 82 acres at Hoback Farm, off Cambridge Road, Wimpole, covered in about 55,000 solar panels – with sheep grazing between them.”

Roy Amner, development director, goes on to say: “The land is classed as agricultural and we are not looking to declassify it. The panels would be mounted on trellises. There is a four-and-a-half meter gap between each row of panels and that provides the grazing area for the sheep so they can roam freely.” Oh and yes it is Cambridge, England.

On the very next day I read another article from an English farm periodical named Farmers Weekly. The headline says it all, “Small sheep breeds solution to solar land use”. This article was aimed at existing solar farms where adequate space was not part of the design. However, the situation referenced in the previous article, producing food in this case lamb was part of the initial design.

Are the British just that much more forward thinking? What I think is food production is closer to the front of the British way of thinking. They remember being hungry during World War II and they are an island of fixed landmass. When thinking you will never run out of land, a common fallacy in American thinking doesn’t enter your mind you think about something as simple as grazing sheep in a solar field.

While it may be too late for the current project adjacent to the State Prison Complex, I hope someone out there will read this or other articles and make sure future projects are broader in scope and more responsible. Nine billion people are counting on such a mindset.
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