

Talia Jalette

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Sent: Sunday, March 28, 2021 11:05 AM
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Subject: THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL SOLAR ARRAYS ON FARMS- FROM A FARMER'S
DAUGHTER
Attachments: J_Marsh Letter.pdf

Dear Respected Town Council & Planning Board Members,

My name is Johanna Marsh and my family owns Elmrock Farm which is located in Ashaway, RI. Elmrock Farm has been in my family since the 1800's and I am hoping to see this legacy continue. **As one of the last few Dairy farms in the state of RI** (please read that again) it is important that our family is able to continue farming. The reason I am writing this letter is to strongly urge you to keep small solar arrays in the farm viability ordinance.

Farming is a very tough way of life and one must live it to experience it. Every day, more and more small farms go out of business. The financial burdens are too great and the economic climate make it nearly impossible to run a small dairy farm. This is seen all across the country and especially here in Rhode Island. In 1964, there were 420 Dairy farms in the state of Rhode Island. Now, sadly, there are only 7. What are the financial burdens, you may ask. Currently, milk prices are at all time low. Small farms, like my parents, don't make enough money for operational costs. To feed the animals, takes more than what a milk check will bring in. We are competing against big factory farms that have economies of scale and have low operational costs. As it has been pointed out, yes, we receive tax breaks for being a farm, but when you are not even breaking even, taxes are a burden. Both of my parents have had jobs off of the farm to help keep this farm running.

The reason I am telling you the above things is because I need you to understand what farming is like today and why small solar is important for these small farms. My parents have 252 acres here in Ashaway. The small solar array in the farm viability ordinance is only for 3 acres of land which is a little bit more than 1% of our total land. By being able to lease our land to a solar company, it gives us a financial lifeline to survive. This money is able to pay our yearly taxes, while still being able to farm and help the operational costs of running a small dairy farm. Having this small solar array is literally saving Elmrock farm and helping it survive for future generations that want to be able to farm.

The other benefits to having a small solar array is that we are actually conserving farmland. When these leases are up, we can go back to using our land for farming as it has not been developed by a developer. This is a win-win situation. It gives us options for the future. So in the future, when Elmrock farm is profitable, we don't have to renew leases and our land will still be able to be farmed on.

If the small solar array is taken out of the farm viability ordinance, the future of Elmrock Farm is bleak. To be completely honest, every year we are more on the verge of shutting down. It gets harder and harder to be able to keep a dairy farm going. Without this town's support, Ashaway will lose another farm. Losing the

farm will have a huge impact on the town. As a family, we will have to decide what to do with our 252 acres and looking at developers might be our only option. Imagine how many houses could fit on our land. Of course, this is not what I want for the future of Elmrock farm, but without your support of farming, my family will not be able to pay the costs to keep our dairy farm going. As they say it takes a village to raise a child but in RI, it takes a village to keep a dairy farm.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you see the importance of keeping family farms in the town of Hopkinton.

Sincerely,
Johanna Marsh
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