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I am writing you, Board members of the Ohio Power Siting Board, out of concern not only for the utility scale solar project applicant in my county of Marion, and the many solar companies in neighboring counties, but more importantly for the total number of acres of Ohio farmland that are being taken out of production for large scale solar projects. The Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Department of Agriculture, and Ohio Power Siting Board may be monitoring the number of farmland acres being leased by solar companies, but it does not appear that there is threshold of when enough farmland has been taken. I do not see where these organizations are asking large-scale solar utility companies to seek out land other than farmland for their projects.

Why is farmland important to Ohio, the US and the World? Farmers produce food, fuel, and fiber for the world. Most farmers also provide environment for wildlife such as wetlands, conservation reserve program areas, and woodlands. The economy of my county and state is primarily from agriculture. In my township, Pleasant Township in Marion County, 83% of the land is in agriculture according to the auditor's office. According to the Marion Chamber of Commerce Profile, agriculture and diversified industries form the economic base of the Marion area with approximately 80% of our land area devoted to agriculture along with a number of ag related industries that are important to our community. According to the Ohio Department of Agriculture website, Ohio's number one industry is food and agriculture, and contributes more than \$105 billion annually to the state's economy. Farmland, economies, jobs, and livelihoods are very much interdependent. Energy is important as well, however the solar and wind companies need to develop ways to capture the sun and wind energy without taking prime farmland out of production.

Even though agriculture is important to our nation, farms are under increasing threat. According to American Farmland Trust's report, *Farms Under Threat*, "**2,000 acres of agricultural land are converted every day—including the most productive, versatile, and resilient land.**" Low-density residential, urban and suburb land-use pose a threat to farmland disappearance, and now utility scale solar is adding to this threat. ODA reports that between 1950 and 2000, Ohio lost more than 6.9 million acres of farmland, nearly one-third of Ohio's agricultural land.

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recent years solar has quietly worked its way into Ohio taking thousands of acres of prime farmland with no intention of stopping. The headline of Savion's Marion County Facebook page this week reads *"Solar energy is positioned to grow by leaps and bounds! Dr. Gilbert Michaud from Ohio University studies renewable energy policy and economic development, and is predicting exponential growth of solar installations. If you want to see Marion County reap the benefits of this growing energy, comment YES below!"* The solar companies will be seeking much more farmland in the future. According to the OPSB Solar Case Status- 71, 973 acres either exist or proposed to transition to solar, and most acreage is agricultural land according to Matt Butler, Information Officer for OPSB. It has taken since 2002 for Ohio's Farmland Preservation program to preserve 85,000 farmland acres, as of August 2020. In some counties there is a wait list to get into the farmland preservation program. Look at how quickly solar coming on to the scene in recent years will soon outnumber the preserved farmland. Ohio Farmland Preservation program has financial limitations to the number of farms that can be selected into the program each year, but it cannot compete with the solar companies that offer enticing and lucrative prices per acre for the life of the solar project. With hardships that farmers face today- fluctuating grain prices, loss of overseas markets, weather related challenges, and grain markets bouncing around crazily with every political utterance, high property taxes, high cost of inputs-it seems as though the solar companies are taking advantage of this situation because they often cite how they financially help the farmer.

While Savion Solar in Marion County tries to sell the idea that their solar project will return the land to agriculture after the 30-year life of the project plus the time it takes to restore the land for agriculture use, one has to understand that in the year 2050 there will be a whole new generation of farmers who may not yet be born. Farming practices will be rapidly changing in the next 30+ years. Farmers who are older than age 65 outnumber farmers who are younger than 45. Many farmers are like us in our 70's and 80's, so in 3 decades it is unlikely that the farmer will be living or able to continue farming to ensure that acres are returned to agriculture. The long term consequences and restoration of farmland converted to industrial solar projects are not known because it has not been in existence. A report I read from an Ohio State University publication pointed out that 50% of farmland will change hands in the next 15 years. And when it changes hands it may likely be sold to convert to other uses because younger people either do not want to get into farming or the cost is too prohibitive. The future is too uncertain to try to sell the idea that solar projects will return the land so the farmer can continue to farm if s/he wants.

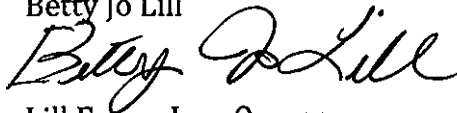
Savion also tries to convince readers by posting statements such as *"solar arrays will have a minimal impact on local fauna. Effects on wildlife during construction are minor, and they generally return to their normal patterns of movement and grazing when a solar project goes live. Drop a heart in the comments if you love Marion County's cute creatures!"* These types of continuous comments are disingenuous. If we put a 10-foot fence around our farm I can guarantee that the normal pattern of wildlife movement would be interrupted, particularly the deer that travel from

woodland to woodland and field to field. To an uninformed public and those far removed from agriculture, their sales comments may be believable but they are insulting to many farmers.

OPSB is the gatekeeper of Ohio's farmland since it is this entity that approves or disapproves of the solar applications on farmland. When OPSB does a rules review I request that restrictions and limitations are established for farmland use by utility solar companies. While we respect individual rights as to how a landowner chooses to use their land, no one is free to do whatever we want on our land due to zoning regulations which utility scale solar companies do not have to follow, and other restrictions not to mention that which is for the good of all. We don't look at farming as individuals, we look at it as a contribution greater than ourselves – the world's food, fuel, and fiber, and saving the precious land that is quickly disappearing from our landscape. The sun's energy may be infinite, but prime farmland is not-and it is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Thank you for your time reading my thoughts and I sincerely hope that you take great care to restrict solar and wind companies from leasing prime farmland for their projects.

Sincerely,
Betty Jo Lill

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betty Jo Lill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Betty" and last name "Lill" clearly distinguishable.

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