



**FLCSA Solar Work Group Meeting Recap
Lakeland, Florida
September 7, 2022**

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Objective: assess progress and map out next steps for creating opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and foresters to participate in solar generation projects, as well as deploy on-farm solar systems to offset electricity costs.

Key FLCSA Consensus Points on Solar Energy to Date:

While we recognize the importance of reducing our dependence on fossil energy resources, we have concerns that the deployment of large-scale, ground mounted solar projects could accelerate the permanent conversion of productive agricultural lands and reduce the multiple use attributes of working lands by reducing or eliminating the ability for these acres to deliver valuable ecosystem services. We do, however, support a multi-use, distributed generation model, where land owners could hold an equity position and produce clean energy for their own use or sale into the grid via rooftop arrays, solar gardens and/or deployment on marginal value lands.

- Current model of solar energy development is large scale, utility owned- not ag friendly;
- A new law enacted in the last legislative session preempts local ordinances that could shape the buildout of solar/clean energy projects; solar farms will now be assessed at the same rate as farms and ranches; could spur further industrial scale solar projects and make it more challenging to advance distributed generation models.
- Direct ownership of systems, supported with grants, tax credits, accelerate depreciation and financing programs, represents a path for early action and may be the “lowest hanging” fruit;
- Other models FLCSA should explore include:
 - Clean energy cooperatives
 - Distributed generation projects with Rural Electric Cooperatives
 - Power purchase agreements (not currently allowed)
- Amount of on-farm/ranch electricity usage will be a factor is driving development; typical ranching operations use less than fruit/vegetable processing operations; those with low needs would not be likely candidates for DG projects unless they had underutilized land where deployment made economic sense (e.g. dry corners)
- Post project liabilities/decommissioning standards need to be developed;
- If properly designed, there can be valuable ecosystem services co-benefits e.g. soil health, pollinator habitat, water filtration and storage, “agrivoltaic” systems that allow for continued production (crops and animals);

- Federal technical and financial assistance (grants and loans) programs exist to help landowners develop rural energy projects e.g. USDA’s REAP program:
 - [Rural Energy for America Program Energy Audits & Renewable Energy Development Grants](#)
 - [Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Loans & Grants](#)
- Beyond solar energy development opportunities, there is a need to help Florida rate payers reduce their electricity rate burden; SE has some of the lowest energy rates in the country but highest utility bills;
- Investments in energy efficiency are needed especially in poor communities; on-bill financing programs may be helpful and should be explored;
- Rural landowners have limited access to solar energy and energy efficiency programs; multiple financing, siting and operational barriers need to be overcome.

Agreed to next steps:

1. Conduct a literature search to determine the state of science on whether “heat islands” around large-scale solar system are disrupting precipitation patterns and negatively affecting adjacent ecosystems.
2. Assuming Senator Wilton Simpson becomes the next Secretary of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, seek his help in creating a solar “advisory committee” that could explore how the current solar energy deployment model is impacting Florida agriculture. Topics this committee should explore include:
 - a. Land fragmentation impacts
 - b. Heat island impacts
 - c. GDP reduction when switching from ag production to utility scale solar
 - d. Decommissioning guidelines at the end of life cycle (what are the current protocols, if any?)
 - e. Migratory bird impacts (e.g. sandhill crane up drafting over solar fields)
 - f. unintended consequences"
 - g. land leases (how many are in place? Why aren't they utilized more?)
 - h. soil health
 - i. aggregate NEM
 - j. tax revenue loss
3. Develop a mission statement for the solar advisory committee
4. Identify partner organizations that could join with us in exploring the impacts of industrial scale solar development on Florida agriculture and wildlife. Candidates include:
 - a. Florida Farm Bureau
 - b. Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association
 - c. Florida Forestry Association
 - d. Audubon Society

- e. FL Cattlemen's Association
 - f. Others
5. Build a model for an alternative generation program that would give producers an opportunity to participate and benefit from.
- a. Explore how Rural Electric Cooperatives might develop a program that would benefit their members
 - b. Start with a conversation with Glade Valley and other coops
6. Promote opportunities for producers to apply for USDA REAP grants to improve energy efficiency and develop "behind the meter" on-farm solar energy generation projects.
- a. Organize a seminar for Florida ag/forestry /livestock groups
 - b. Develop newsletter articles ag organizations could run promoting REAP to their members
7. Policy work
- a. Defend net metering
 - b. Remain on call when solar energy advocates need help in Tallahassee
 - c. Scott Thomasson agreed to help develop talking points to guide conversations FLCSA members have with state legislators.
8. Recruit more members to join the FLCSA solar work group:
- a. Smouk family
 - b. Others