

An unhealthy and unnecessary competition between food production and green energy is threatening food security in Maryland. The bad news is, this is a dangerous conflict of our own making. The good news is, we can fix it.

In Harford County, where I serve as county executive, recent state legislation requires us to allow 5,500 acres of viable farmland- the equivalent of over 4,000 football fields - to be covered by solar panels before county government and the citizens we serve have a say in how and where these projects are developed. The result is that farmland with the best quality soils for food production is being sacrificed to the highest bidder for solar farms.

With local land use authority, we could encourage solar projects in areas in need of redevelopment or on lesser quality soils. We could also require reasonable setbacks and buffers to protect neighboring communities. But the state took this authority away from all Maryland counties with Senate Bill 931/House Bill 1036, Public Utilities - Generating Stations - Generation and Siting (Renewable Energy Certainty Act).

Supporters of this legislation said that farming could resume in 25 or 30 years when solar panels have reached their end of life and are removed. But there have been no studies on the long-term impact on viable soils. With rich topsoils removed to facilitate installation of acres of solar panels these precious farms may be lost forever.

Make no mistake, the threat of food insecurity is real. Just five years ago, the Covid-19 pandemic exposed our vulnerability to out-of-state food production. Local farming operations - especially local farms that can produce healthy, naturally-grown varieties of food products - are a much more reliable and accessible source of food production than distant corporate farms.

Local farm production also boosts local economies. In addition to farmers' markets and farmstands, Harford County grocers like Redner's and Kleins ShopRite buy quantities of produce from local farms to sell at their stores, and everyone wins.

When active farmland disappears the profession of farming fades, accelerating an alarming trend. Approximately 40% of all farmlands in Maryland are no longer owner-occupied. Instead, they're leased by farmers who rent the land from non-resident owners. This arrangement brings rental income to the owner, but that rental income is no match for high dollar offers landowners receive from solar conglomerates. Solar companies have no reason to know or care whether their behemoth structures are covering barren land or fertile soil. But we care, so we must act quickly.

Every Maryland county is headed down this path unless we pass new legislation in the 2026 General Assembly. Harford is working with state legislators on exactly that - to protect viable farmland and put solar farms in their proper place. Join us by [letting your state representatives know](#) where you stand.

