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Kennedy, NY 14747

Draft Scoping Plan Comments

NYSERDA

17 Columbia Circle

Albany, NY 12203-6399

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**Draft Scoping Plan Comments:
Collateral Damage of Solar Development**

Chautauqua County has a very robust agricultural industry. There are very many profitable crop, dairy, beef, vegetable and grape operations that rely on rented land in which they have collectively invested millions of dollars. Our farmers are now competing for use of this land with renewable energy developers who are highly subsidized by our own state and federal governments. Using these subsidies, developers are offering leases many times the established agricultural market value that our farms are currently paying. Proposed sites are not just on our lowest productivity soils: developers choose sites based on their proximity to transmission lines.

As with all government attempts to socially engineer behavior, there are unintended, far reaching consequences of the land conversion. Although the increase in rental payments personally benefits the landowner, the unseen positive community impacts of farming are lost. Farms will no longer spend money in the local community for the seed that would have been planted, the fertilizer that would have been applied, or the crop protection services provided by a local retailer. The opportunity for skilled farmworkers to ply their trade is also lost. Farms that have invested in facilities and machinery have fewer acres to spread that investment over. Mechanics that repair that equipment see their client base shrink. For example, when all inputs are added up, non-rental cash invested in an acre of corn is well over \$500 per acre.

Any New York crop-land is still being farmed because it is profitable to do so. In the long-term, taking this land out of production will force other less productive, more environmentally sensitive land to be farmed. It won't likely be in New York State. The progressive policies passed in Albany of the last two years have severely disadvantaged New York farmers. They have been forced to pay wages well above the labor market values of competing states. Neighboring states are able to use EPA tested and approved crop protection tools like chlorpyrifos that have been outlawed in New York State (neonicotinoids and potentially glyphosate to follow) based on feelings and not science. And, not surprisingly, the farm energy costs that these projects are subsidizing are skyrocketing in New York State.

Albany's answer to these concerns is more social engineering. New York State is spending millions of dollars to buy the development rights on cropland that is threatened by development near urban areas and state parks. These incentives absolutely discourage construction of new, affordable housing and also keep out industrial solar, preserving the value of homes and their view-scape. Competitive funding favors protecting farmland near cities and encourages solar developers to take the land of our rural communities.

Farm communities rely on a network of support businesses- equipment dealers, feed mills, crop input retailers, hardware stores, veterinarians, nutritionists, crop advisors, accountants and other professionals. When communities lose farms, they eventually lose all of these services. Activists, politicians, and bureaucrats pushing solar development say that land used for industrial solar can be brought back into production. This might be true, albeit at large expense that will likely be borne by the public. However, when a community loses its agricultural support community, it is not coming back.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan L. Steward", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel L. Steward

Crop Advisor, Farmer

Chautauqua County