

Solar grazing is win/win for sheep farmers, the environment, and Fayette Co.

BY JIM MANSFIELD

Solar energy projects and farming operations have something in common — they each require large, relatively flat tracts of land. At one point, this shared need seemed to put the two in opposition to each other. Any land that would be good for farming would also be good for non-polluting renewable energy infrastructure, but only one of these uses was possible.

In my 20 years raising sheep, I have seen this dynamic change for the better, especially within recent years. It turns out that using the same land for clean energy production and farming is not only possible, but mutually beneficial.

I attend the American Sheep Industry Association Annual Convention every year. It's always been a great opportunity to discuss everything from best practices for raising sheep to promising new markets for lamb and wool. However, people at the most recent ASI Convention were talking about a new topic: the promise of solar development for sheep farmers and ranchers like me.

Farmers and ranchers discussing energy infrastructure in the past were often worried about how the development of a project like a solar farm would negatively impact farmland. At the last ASI Annual Convention, however, conversations were about how solar was revi-



JIM MANSFIELD

Turkey Creek Solar Ranch in Garrard County allows sheep farming and solar energy at the same time.

talizing farmland, and farming opportunities along with it.

These agrivoltaics projects, which combine agricultural and solar energy-producing operations, are opening up options for Kentucky's farmers and ranchers. Over the multi-decade lifespan of a project, shepherds with solar grazing contracts can see their flocks flourish and grow. Rotational grazing practices improve the land through regular cycles of foraging and fertilization, followed by rest. After a few years, the soil is in better shape than it would be if the land had remained untouched. One sheep solar grazer reported a 300% increase in soil organic matter after multiple years of sheep rotational grazing at that site.

These solar installations have about a 40-year life. After that, they can be removed and the farm

land restored—whereas a housing development is never going back to being farm land.

Today's sheep ranchers view solar grazing sites as a pathway for us to access more grazing land *and* get paid to graze it. Solar grazing contracts provide shepherds with a long-term, new, steady source of income and also with the opportunity to increase their lamb production and income with sales to restaurants and grocery stores, like we do at Four Hills Farm. Our farm and the farms we work with have sold lamb to local and regional grocery stores for 16 years (see our lamb at Whole Foods Markets in Kentucky and Ohio).

As Lexington and Fayette County's Council considers the current Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment, I urge them to take into account the

opportunity that a ZOTA allowing for agrivoltaics projects can support local farmers while also providing much needed clean energy to help power our daily lives.

As a former president of the Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers' Association, I know there are sheep farmers in Kentucky that would jump on the opportunity to expand their grazing land and be paid a steady income to manage the vegetation on a large solar site. Solar grazing is a win/win for sheep farmers, the environment, and Fayette County residents.

Jim Mansfield began raising Katahdin Hair sheep in 2005. He owns and operates Four Hills Farm in Woodford County. Jim is the KY representative to the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), and is a certified Solar Grazer.



COURTESY OF BLUEOVAL SK

The \$5.8 billion battery park, BlueOval SK, is a joint venture between Ford Motor Co. and South Korean partner SK On, and is expected to employ 5,000 people once fully up and running.

Blue Oval SK union vote is a fight for all Kentucky workers

BY JASON BAILEY



The hard working men and women at the Ford Blue Oval SK, also known as the BOSK plant in Hardin County, will vote on forming a union later this month. Their campaign to join the United Auto Workers (UAW) is about winning safe working conditions, a voice on the job and affordable healthcare. But the vote is also a huge opportunity for every working-class Kentuckian across the state.

That's because the challenges facing Kentucky auto workers in recent decades mirror what's happened to the entire

workforce. As our recent report at the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy shows, job quality in the Kentucky auto industry has declined as it has become less unionized. In the last decade, median production wages fell by \$9,321 a year after taking inflation into account.

Once widely perceived as "good jobs," many parts and assembly occupations now don't pay enough for a decent life. And alongside deteriorating pay is a lack of say in issues like safety and health, a huge concern for BOSK workers exposed to dangerous chemicals.

But the historic strike and contract victory by the UAW in 2023 is beginning to turn things around. UAW members won a 25% increase in wages among other key improvements. Non-union employers were startled by

the size of UAW's win. Immediately, BOSK and Toyota bumped up wages. But that just provided a taste of what would come if those workers had a union of their own.

When wage earners join together and fight, it helps not just them but workers at similar businesses. To compete for employees or because they fear unions, those companies increase job quality. But as the share of Kentucky workers who are unionized fell from 26% in 1979 to 11% today, that leverage has weakened. As a result, wages for workers across the middle and the bottom of the economy have stagnated, while incomes at the top soared.

Union density has dropped because powerful corporations lobbied to weaken labor laws and undermine unions. They've pursued aggressive anti-union propagan-

da campaigns, including at BOSK, where the company has spent untold amounts of money on high-dollar consultants and slick advertising. UAW alleges that BOSK has fired workers for organizing and forced them to attend closed-door captive audience meetings, both of which are illegal.

As a maker of electric vehicle batteries, BOSK is the future of automobile production. Governor Beshear calls it the largest battery plant "on planet Earth," and media coverage of the plant has been extensive. Similarly, the decision its workers make on a union will be widely watched by Kentucky workers. Some will ask: "If those workers can come together for a voice and dignity at their workplace, why can't we?"

Kentuckians have another stake in this fight as well: we all helped pay for BOSK. The Kentucky General Assembly held a special legislative session in 2021 to give the company a \$250 million check, and the federal government has provided \$9.6 billion in loans. Isn't it reasonable to expect safe jobs, respect for workers and economy-boosting wages for such a massive investment of public dollars?

The BOSK workers have discovered a truth so many of us have never experienced. Solidarity is a miracle drug. It's the closest we have to a cure for an ailing and unequal society.

Do what you can to support these workers in the coming weeks. Their win is a win for all of us.

Jason Bailey is executive director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, www.kypolicy.org.

FROM PAGE 1C

PRATHER

turns to men. Do you see yourself as the head of your household?(This was something his First Century audience took absolutely for granted.) Then treat your wife as Jesus treated his church. Jesus gave up an exalted position to serve the church in all things, up to and including laying down his very life for it. Men, go act thusly.

Next, he turns to parents — and especially fathers. Serve your children, he says. Don't make them angry. Bring them up in a nurturing manner, in the wisdom of the Lord.

Children, he says, become servants to your parents. Respect and obey them.

He moves to slavery. (This is another stance for which he's often wrongly pilloried). By some estimates, more than half of the early Christians were slaves, so Paul isn't speaking theoretically here; he's writing to people he knows, worships with and loves. Elsewhere, Paul tells slaves that if they have an opportunity to gain their freedom, they should take it.

But while you find yourself confined as a slave, he says here, serve your master with a sincere heart, doing your work as unto the Lord. Remember that even in this unfortunate position you're representing Jesus, who can be glorified only through love, humility and mercy.

To the comparatively few slave owners in the church,

Paul says: remember you're no more important to God than the people you enslave. Quit threatening them — you'll answer to the same God. In short, humble yourselves.

Paul's message to all these people is exactly the same, whether they're wives, husbands, parents, slaves or slave-owners: you can't glorify God while guarding your rights, stoking your ego or brow-beating your supposed inferiors.

You glorify God — you introduce his kingdom into the world — by voluntarily becoming the inferior. That's what Jesus did when he left heaven, came to Earth and died as a criminal.

Paul's teaching is plainly stated, yet it's been reviled and distorted by men and women alike, by theological progressives and reactionaries. Hardly anybody even seems to recognize it, because its premise runs counter to everything we've been taught from birth.

Give up our rights? Become servants instead? Balderdash!

If it matters, I don't find what Paul says in Ephesians any easier to put into practice than anyone else does. I fail miserably. But I think he was right.

Paul Prather is pastor of Bethesda Church near Mount Sterling. You can email him at pratpd@yahoo.com.

FROM PAGE 1C

BLACKFORD

just two years later, a non-profit called Black Yarn is presenting the documentary film "Lexington: Resilience in the Redline," which will premiere Aug. 23 at the Lyric Theatre.

"I am so excited," said Bond, who is the co-founder and president of Black Yarn. "This is a project that's really is well done — I'm excited to share it with the community to see what conversations it sparks.

"The messaging is timely because of the political environment right now. I hope it can be unifying of how we put it all together, because it really is a unifying story."

The documentary features interviews with experts and community members about their experiences of redlining and housing segregation, from the Black hamlets in rural Fayette County to segregated schools, and the strength and, yes, resilience, inculcated in those communities, along with the wealth gaps that still exist.

(Full disclosure: I also was interviewed because of my columns on Segregated Lexington and on the city's civil rights movement that went uncovered by the Herald and the Leader.)

Black Yarn's scope is much bigger than housing; Bond described it as a wheel with housing at the center, with spokes on health, education, transportation and food access that all need the rigorous exploration.

"We want the film to be a launching pad for further collaboration, research and storytelling," Bond said.

The Aug. 23 premiere will be a fundraiser for Black Yarn held at the Lyric Theatre, once the center of Lexington's Black entertainment district. It's also part of the 250Lex celebrations.

The evening will begin at 5:30 p.m. with a reception featuring much of the research from the film. From 7:15-8 p.m., a panel discussion will introduce

the film, which will show from 8-9:30 p.m. Tickets can be bought here.

There will also be a free screening of the film at the Kentucky Theatre on Tuesday Aug. 26 from 7-8:30 p.m. You must register for tickets, which include complimentary popcorn and a free beverage. The event is being underwritten by the Blue Grass Community Foundation, which also sponsors Black Philanthropy Month in August.

"Hosting the community for a free screening of "Lexington: Resilience in the Redline" is a way to bring people together — neighbors, nonprofits, businesses, and change-makers — because we do better when we have opportunities to learn and do good together," said foundation director Lisa Adkins.

"We're excited to host this screening during Black Philanthropy Month to share Lexington's Black stories, celebrate resilience, and inspire reflection and action."

Bond says she hopes the film will inspire Lexingtonians to learn more about their history and come away with a sense of community.

"Despite what some of our national leaders are doing, we want to show that Lexington is still willing to lean in to our diverse population to make space for researchers and truth tellers," Bond said.

This is such an important point. Federal and state leaders are trying to rewrite our history, from changing exhibits at the Smithsonian museums to eliminating diversity in higher education. Case in point: UK, which was an early supporter of events surrounding Segregated Lexington and Black Yarn recently declined to sponsor the premiere.

But we can't stop talking about the true history of our city or our country because it's the only way we can understand how we got in this mess.

"Resilience in the Redline" is part of that resistance.