

Q&A ABOUT UTILITY-SCALE SOLAR IN OHIO

UTILITY SCALE SOLAR ENERGY COALITION



What is "utility-scale" solar?

Large-scale solar facilities generate 50+ megawatts of power – enough electricity to contribute directly to Ohio's power grid. These projects must go through a stringent state review and approval process. There has been a major drop in the cost of solar generation over the past decade, making it cost competitive with, or cheaper than, traditional coal, nuclear and natural gas.

What is the expected economic impact for Ohio?

A 2020 study by Ohio University estimates the effect of the projects planned over the next 40 years to be \$18 billion in economic impact, 54,113 construction jobs and \$67 million in annual taxes. Rural Ohio stands to gain the most from solar development.

Is there enough sunny weather in Ohio for this?

Yes! Improved solar technology allows for power generation year-round, with peak production between late spring and early autumn (the hottest and sunniest times of the year), exactly when demand for electricity is greatest.

What is driving the investment of large-scale solar power in Ohio?

With rapidly increasing demand by Ohio employers, communities and residents, combined with major declines in the cost of solar generation and the state's ideal conditions to develop solar fields, clean energy has become an integral part of Ohio's energy mix. Ohio has an abundance of flat land, a robust overhead transmission network and a good climate.

Where are these projects possible in Ohio?

Sites are selected based on factors including proximity to transmission lines, flat land, and weather. Flood plains, wetlands and supportive geology are also considered.

What does utility-scale solar mean for Ohio jobs?

More than 7,200 currently work in the solar industry. That figure will quickly escalate. Ohio ranks 7th in the nation in solar energy labor force, and a recent Ohio University study estimates that 30% of components used in Ohio projects are made here in Ohio, creating a reliable supply chain of Ohio businesses and industry.

What do solar farms look like?

Solar panels have a low profile and feature setbacks and vegetative screening around the perimeter. Solar farms are easy to screen from sight with trees and large shrubs given the flat contour of most sites, minimizing visual impacts to neighbors.

What is the review/approval process?

All large-scale solar developments go through an extensive and collaborative process involving the developers, the landowners and the community, followed by a rigorous review process by the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB). The OPSB process is considered one of the most stringent and thorough in the nation and involves the Ohio EPA, the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and the departments of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. The process involves numerous public hearings and opportunities for stakeholder input.



What can be expected during and after construction?

Construction generally lasts 12-18 months and there will be increased traffic, building activity and some noise during that phase. Once the project is operational, solar arrays are visually unobtrusive, have little to no lighting and are essentially silent.

How do solar farms benefit farmers?

Solar is lucrative for Ohio farmers with up-front and annual payments that are usually three to five times greater than the income earned from traditional crops. Commodity prices of crops rise and fall creating uncertainty for farmers. Solar leases provide rural families revenue, stability and confidence in ownership for future generations.

How do solar farms benefit local communities?

Most utility-scale solar projects make substantial and long-term annual payments directly to communities where they are located under the state's Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program to support local schools and critical community services. The payments typically result in more local revenue than the taxes they replace.

Under a PILOT agreement, clean energy developers pay a county a fixed annual amount per megawatt in place of real and personal property tax and must employ at least 80% Ohio residents. These fixed annual payments are made for the life of the project, which is often 40 years. PILOT funds are especially helpful to economically challenged communities.

Large-scale solar projects underway or planned are expected to generate \$2.7 billion over 40 years for counties, schools and other local government entities like health systems, emergency services, libraries and senior services.

Are there environmental and health impacts?

Solar projects cause no air or water pollution. There are no dangers or risks involved in living near such a project. Cleaner energy also can help protect our health. A federal analysis showed widespread solar adoption would reduce nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide and particulates, all of which cause health problems.

Are solar panels safe?

Solar panels are one of the cleanest and safest forms of power generation available. Solar panels are made of non-toxic and damage-resistant materials made to last for decades in harsh environments. They contain no liquids that can spill or any materials that could result in a chemical fire.

Many solar developers recycle panels when they need to be retired.

Are drainage systems protected during construction?

Proper drainage and stormwater management are important to solar developers. Developers are required to quickly repair or replace any drain tile that is damaged during construction and work with the EPA to ensure robust stormwater systems are in place.

What happens to solar panels at the end of their useful life?

There are strict requirements by the state to safely remove (or "decommission") the panels when they are no longer functional, and return the land to its current condition. The estimated life of the projects is 40 years. Ohio law requires funding be in place to pay the decommissioning costs.