



United States Department of Agriculture

Rural Development

January 10, 2024

Rural Utilities Service

Mr. B.F. Hicks
PO Box 985
Mt. Vernon, TX 75457

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Ave SW, Room 4121
Stop 1510
Washington, DC
20250

Dear Mr. Hicks,

Voice 202.720.9540

Thank you for your May 18, 2023 letter regarding renewable energy projects and their potential impact on productive farmland in the United States.

Productive prime farmland is extremely important to Secretary Vilsack and this Agency. It serves as the backbone of our agricultural and rural communities. Part of protecting prime farmland is ensuring our small and medium sized farmers are able to stay in business, and clean energy – if done right – can be a part of how we do that.

The Inflation Reduction Act provided the most funding to rural America since President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act into law in 1936. Farmers now can get money from USDA to adopt rural renewable energy projects on their farm and use that energy to lower their costs. And, as long as state and local policies allow it, farmers could sell any excess energy to their local rural electric cooperative or utility, generating important new income. This lowers utility costs for everybody in rural areas and, importantly, creates another way for farmers to earn income and grow rural America. Farmers can also generate new income by leasing unproductive or suboptimal land, creating another income source that might just be the make-or-break thing that allows them to stay in business.

We want to do this right – protect prime farmland and ensure that farmers have every tool they need to be successful. We have just scheduled listening sessions about farmland and clean energy siting entitled “American Farms, Rural Benefits” and welcome your participation. We will listen to all stakeholders and look for the best ways to maximize protection of prime farmland while supporting farmers and others in rural America in creating rural prosperity from affordable, new clean energy.

Thank you again for your letter. We appreciate your interest in providing more opportunities for farmers and rural Americans.

Sincerely,

**ANDREW
BERKE** Digitally signed by
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Date: 2024.01.11
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Andy Berke
Administrator
Rural Utilities Service

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