



KEEPING FAMILY FARMS
IN THE FAMILY

Pace University Energy and Climate Center Study

A recent study from the Pace University Energy and Climate Center finds that EDF Renewables' proposed 350 MW Ridge View Solar project could have significant, lasting benefits for the Town of Hartland and Niagara County, New York. Published in April 2022, the [study](#) looks primarily at the project's economic impact, which is resoundingly positive—over the course of its 30-year life, Ridge View Solar could bring between \$177 to \$229.4 million in economic benefits to the local community and surrounding region.

The Ridge View Solar study was conducted by Dr. Craig Hart, Executive Director of the Pace Energy and Climate Center at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law. “At Pace, we’re committed to understanding the economic and social impacts of different energy choices,” he explains. “The study relied on data from the federal government and New York State, in addition to survey information and extensive interviews with participating farms and landowners. We’ve sought to understand the changes they’ve seen in the area’s economy over the past few decades and how this solar project will impact the town and region. The Ridge View Solar project will help strengthen the local economy and stabilize small family farms.”

Ridge View Solar will contribute to the local economy in many ways, including direct and indirect job creation during the construction phase as well as throughout the project’s operational life; lease payments to participating landowners; payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) and the project’s host community agreements; a community benefit fund; and a more prosperous local economy due to the influx of revenue created by the project.

The study found that the total local revenue—that is, the total economic benefit for landowners and businesses – generated by land used for farming in Niagara County averages \$1,080 per acre. In contrast, the Ridge View Solar project is expected to generate between \$2,949 to \$3,824 per acre each year over its 30-year operational life—up to 2.7 times more revenue than is generated by agricultural production.

Key Takeaways from the Pace Study



The Ridge View Solar project is expected to bring between **\$177 to \$229.4 million in economic benefits** to the Town of Hartland and Niagara County over the course of its 30-year life.



The total local revenue generated by land used for the Ridge View Solar project is expected to range between **\$2,949-\$3,824 per acre annually—up to 2.7 times more** than the total local revenue generated by land in Niagara County used for farming.



Stable long-term revenue from lease payments will help keep family farms in the family, **preserving local ownership.**

“The economic benefits of the project are quite significant,” says Dr. Hart. “Hosting solar panels creates a stable, reliable source of additional income that can keep family farms in the family, preserving their way of life and creating the possibility of passing the land on to the next generation.”

“It’s important to emphasize that the financial benefits of Ridge View Solar aren’t limited to participating landowners,” remarks Kevin Campbell, Director of Development with EDF Renewables. “This study shows that the community at large will also see meaningful positive economic impacts that will go a long way toward improving local services and infrastructure, as well as help to keep taxes low.”

Along with detailed information about the project’s economic benefits, the study gives an overview of the myriad of challenges facing small farmers in upstate New York and across the U.S. Noting that globalization has introduced significant competition putting downward pressure on prices for agricultural products nationwide, the study also points to rising prices for key inputs like labor, seed and fertilizer as additional reasons why many smaller, family-run farms have become uneconomic and have had to cease operations in recent decades. Several small farms in Hartland and

Niagara County have succumbed to these pressures, and the result is consolidation: family land is sold or leased to create larger farms that can achieve the economies of scale necessary to remain competitive.

For many smaller farms, solar offers a solution that benefits landowners and communities alike. “Our study illustrates that diversifying a farm’s income by devoting a modest portion of acreage to solar offers protection against risks related to commodity prices, yields and rising costs. This additional revenue can be used to repay debt and bolster household savings, which will make the community as a whole stronger and more resilient,” Dr. Hart observes.

“There is a sense of pride in owning land anywhere, and that’s especially true in this region where it’s often passed down from generation to generation,” reflects Mr. Campbell. “Ridge View Solar can help families continue to own their land for many more generations while earning steady revenue for farming the sun.”

“Farming is about generating value from land,” he continues. “In that sense, solar is like growing crops or running a dairy – and in fact it even provides long-term stable financial benefits for the community at large.”



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~ Dr. Craig Hart
Executive Director,
Pace Energy and Climate Center
Elisabeth Haub School of Law

Selected factors identified in the study as negatively affecting American farmers and their communities:

- Farm debt is at the highest level in three decades.¹
- Over half of farms have been losing money every year since 2013.²
- Farm bankruptcies hit an 8-year high in 2019,³ with many farmers forgoing reorganization because long-term trends make it pointless.⁴
- Vertically integrated agrobusiness earn the vast majority of consumer food expenditures, leaving less than three percent of the consumer dollar spent for net-farm income.
- About 40 percent of farmland in the United States is operated by renters.⁵
- By 2030, over 75 percent of farmland owners will be women over the age of 60,⁶ and the children of farmers are often not pursuing farming given its challenges and low returns.




Source: *Strengthening Small Farms and Their Communities Through Solar Farming: Ridge View 350 MW Solar PV Project Social and Economic Impact Assessment*.

ABOUT EDF RENEWABLES


EDFR has developed more than **24 GW** of wind, solar and storage projects across North America over the past three decades, and routinely asks independent experts to conduct economic impact assessments for its projects. The full Ridge View Solar study as well as an executive summary of the key findings are available on the [Pace University Energy and Climate Center](#) website via the links to the left. The study was prepared by the Pace Energy and Climate Center and funded by EDF Renewables. The opinions expressed therein do not necessarily reflect those of EDF Renewables.



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Full study: [*Strengthening Small Farms and Their Communities Through Solar Farming: Ridge View 350 MW Solar PV Project Social and Economic Impact Assessment*](#)



Executive summary: [*Strengthening Small Farms and Their Communities Through Solar Farming: Ridge View 350 MW Solar PV Project Social and Economic Impact Assessment*](#)