

MIDLANDS VOICES

Agriculture and renewables are friends for the future

If there is one constant in agriculture, it's that farmland functions as an investment in family, in our culture, our economy, and in our American way of life.



MIKE JOHANNS

Our farmers and ranchers today have an attractive option that works alongside their agricultural operations to provide income and to aid in the conservation of land: renewable

energy projects.

Maintaining the land itself through uses such as renewable energy ensures conservation of the farmland for future generations. Renewable energy projects harvest a crop just like other farming methods. Therefore, it should be clear that landowners have the right to allow renewable energy projects on their farmland.

Most importantly, these projects allow the land to rest and regenerate, similar to a longer crop rotation or any other conservation effort. Solar and wind operations function as a conservation strategy and another source of income to stabilize farming and ranching operations.

Growing up as the son of a dairy farmer, I witnessed firsthand the everyday struggles of farmers. Many of us that live or have lived a farm or ranch life are familiar with hard work. It

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is the farming lifestyle that instilled a work ethic in me, not just on the farm, but later in my public career where I supported farmers and ranchers across America.

Through my decades working with farmers and ranchers, I learned firsthand that harvesting wind and solar energy works in tandem with current agricultural methods. These renewable projects are another tool and another crop to provide farmers and ranchers with reliable income while allowing the land to rest and regenerate, aiding in conservation and increasing productivity for future uses.

Since the 1980s, the Department of Agriculture working hand-in-hand with our farmers and ranchers, has developed conservation programs to rest and revitalize the land. Today's solar and wind energy projects do just that — rest

soil, conserve land and water, and create a better environment — all while continuing to harvest already existing resources like the wind and the sun.

Farmers and ranchers have always used new technology to improve their operations. From tractors to seed, very few of the tools in farming mirror their predecessors from 15 years ago, much less the farms of our parents and grandparents.

While serving as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, I constantly promoted the use of science and technology to improve farming and ranching practices. Better cropping practices, better genetics, and new opportunities for farmers and ranchers were central to my agenda. I championed leveling the playing field for farmers and ranchers in foreign markets to increase in-

come opportunities.

I have seen firsthand that new technology developed in America increased demand for our products worldwide. New markets, new practices, new methods have been a part of the natural evolution of American agriculture for generations.

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In the coming months and years, some farmers will plant corn or soybeans on their land while others will set aside some acreage for solar or wind projects. Both will yield a harvest and continue to let the land produce for their families, and their investment in farmland will pay off for future generations.

Mike Johanns is the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, serving from 2005-2007. He currently serves as a co-chair and Nebraska state chairman for the Center for Infrastructure and Economic Development.