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## Appeal filed over Solar Gen 2 project

By ELIZABETH VARIN

Imperial Valley Press Staff Writer

2:09 AM PDT, October 11, 2011

Farmers have filed to appeal a decision about a solar project that has gotten some agriculture industry personnel up in arms.

A group filed Monday to appeal the decision of the county Environmental Evaluation Committee, which decided in late September that Solar Gen 2's solar projects between Brawley and Calipatria needed only a mitigated negative declaration instead of a full environmental impact report, said Brawley farmer Michael Cox. He owns land next to the proposed solar site.

A mitigated negative declaration is given when the initial study of a project shows potentially significant effects on the environment, but agreements have been made to mitigate those impacts. An environmental impact report is required when, during the preliminary review, there is substantial evidence the project may have a significant effect on the environment.

The group that filed the appeal doesn't want the project on that land, Cox said.

"We want to stop this from being put on farm ground," he said. "We just don't feel it's compatible to put on farm ground."

Though the project is only permitted for 25 years, the ground can't just revert back to farmland, Cox said. It's not a temporary project, and the county should have to rezone the land if they want to put solar on it.

A group of farmers has been making its rounds lately, presenting its issues with the project to Imperial County and Imperial Irrigation District boards. The group claims the project and others that are proposed on farmland in the county will have potentially harmful impacts on the agriculture industry as a whole.

Solar Gen 2 officials chalk some of the problems up to misinformation going around about the project.

The proposed project will take up three sites, about 1,500 acres total, said Steve Zaminski, chief executive officer of Solar Gen 2. It's less than half a percent of the agricultural land in the Valley.

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Farmers won't have to do anything differently if they farm nearby and the solar project will use much less water than farming, which leaves more for the rest of the residents, he said.

While some have claimed the project will lose jobs when compared to the number of agricultural jobs that would occur both directly on site and indirectly, Zaminski questioned the numbers that people are mentioning. The solar project will have about 300 jobs during the nine-month construction phase and about 30 permanent, good-paying jobs on site.

The company is even committed to hiring locally and has set up \$350,000 to fund training for local residents, he said. He added that there have been some mistakes made. His group should have tried to meet with farmers in the area earlier.

"We want to be good neighbors," he said. "We just want to have the opportunity to meet with these folks."

Cox said he had been approached after he brought up issues at the September county meeting, but passed on meeting with the company. He appreciates the invitation, but doesn't plan on meeting with representatives.

"We're really, really worked up about this," he said. "We are really against having solar projects on active farm ground."

Staff Writer Elizabeth Varin can be reached at [evarin@ivpressonline.com](mailto:evarin@ivpressonline.com) or 760-337-3441.

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