Prime farmland is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses.” The USDA National Resources Inventory takes stock of existing prime farmland, revealing that there are ample acres of usable farmland in the Midwest for both the food and energy sectors.

Do renewables require prime farmland?
No; about 65% of the 313.7 million acres of prime farmland in the U.S. are considered cropland, which is not exclusive to food production. Other purposes include growth of ethanol-producing crops, urban sprawl and rural transportation. Furthermore, thanks to innovation in biotechnology and seed blends, corn and soybean yields expand even as acreage used for farming decreases. Renewables are cash crops with a small footprint.

Renewables produce and conserve
Solar and wind can coexist with a variety of conservation efforts. Some community garden and utility-scale solar projects pair beehives with pollinator-friendly native plants and flowers in and around the project area.

Currently, three times as many prime farmland acres are used as pastureland for grazing as there would be needed to power the entire grid using solar. Solar and wind systems supplemented with vegetation can be managed by sheep and goat grazing rather than mowing, making our land even more productive.

Altogether, conservation and vegetation plans amidst renewables lead to healthier soil, improved water storage and filtration, carbon sequestration, erosion reduction, and habitat preservation.