

# Protecting Property Rights, Powering Rural Economies in Michigan

Michigan's farmers and rural landowners face mounting challenges: rising input costs, volatile commodity prices, and generational transitions that make keeping land in the family more difficult. For many, leasing land for renewable energy projects offers a voluntary, reliable source of income that helps preserve farms and strengthen local economies.

But too often, outdated local zoning rules and misinformation block these opportunities. When landowners are prevented from responsibly leasing their land, they lose an important tool to sustain their livelihoods—and private property rights are undermined.

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## Key Findings

- **Landowner freedom is at stake.** Farmers and rural residents want the right to decide how to use their land, whether for crops, grazing, or leasing for energy projects.
- **Energy leasing supports farm viability.** Solar and wind leases provide stable, long-term income that helps cover property taxes, reinvest in operations, and preserve family farms.
- **Misinformation fuels opposition.** Many local restrictions stem from misconceptions about renewable projects, not evidence.
- **Fair siting matters.** Consistent, transparent, and legally sound rules protect landowner rights while ensuring community concerns are addressed.

*This fact sheet draws from Evergreen Action and the Private Property Rights Institute's joint report, [Protecting Property Rights, Powering Rural Economies: Firsthand Perspectives on Energy Siting from Landowners and Local Officials](#), highlighting the voices of Michigan farmers and local leaders navigating the energy infrastructure siting issue.*

# Landowner Case Studies

## Bob Wackernagel

*Michigan Farmer*

- Leased 100 acres of poor-yield land for solar to help pay taxes and keep the farm in the family
- Motivated by rising costs and practical needs
- Worked with developers to reduce visual and community impacts
- Faced opposition from neighbors upset about losing “their view”
- Frustrated by lack of respect from longtime community members
- Supports Michigan’s permitting law for clarity and landowner rights
- Views solar as a future crop essential to staying on the land



## Howard Linnabary

*Leoni Township Supervisor*

- Longtime energy professional turned local official
- Helped township adopt a solar ordinance to set clear guidelines
- Emphasizes transparency: early maps and site plans build trust with community
- Believes misinformation, not ideology, drives most opposition
- Stresses respect for property rights: if projects meet requirements, landowners should move forward
- Sees fair rules as critical to giving both landowners and communities certainty



# Policy Recommendations for Michigan

## Support and Implement Public Act 233 (2023)

- Ensure local governments have the resources to adopt Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinances (CREOs) that meet state criteria.
- Maintain a state-level backstop through the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to prevent indefinite delays, while still allowing developers to use local permitting route.

## Protect Landowner Rights

- Affirm the right of farmers to lease their land for energy development.
- Prevent local ordinances from unfairly denying reasonable, legal use of private property.

## Provide Local Governments with Tools

- Share sample ordinances to make adoption consistent and defensible
- Offer technical assistance and funding to help municipalities develop CREOs.

## Ensure Community Benefits

- Encourage developers to use local workforce and where feasible, direct revenue to schools, emergency services, and rural infrastructure directly in communities.
- Projects should also make these contributions highly visible—through public reporting or local partnerships—so residents clearly see and understand the benefits flowing back into their community.

## Conclusion

Michigan's farmers need practical tools to keep land productive and in the family—and state policy must support that. By implementing Public Act 233 and ensuring fair siting processes, Michigan can protect property rights, sustain family farms, and strengthen rural economies while building a more secure energy future.