

# Protecting Property Rights, Powering Rural Economies in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania'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But too often, outdated local zoning rules and misinformation block these opportunities.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.
- **Energy independence resonates.** Interviewees linked local energy development to greater U.S. energy security, lower household costs, and reduced reliance on outside sources.

*This factsheet 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 Pennsylvania farmers and local leaders navigating the energy infrastructure siting issue.*

- **Local officials need clearer tools.** Township supervisors and county commissioners emphasized the need for sample ordinances, technical assistance, and legally defensible siting frameworks.
- **Fair siting matters.** Consistent, transparent, and legally sound rules protect landowner rights while ensuring community concerns are addressed.

## Landowner Case Studies

### Dwight Ely

*Bucks County Farmer & Processor*

- Installed solar to power farm and USDA meat processing facility
- Generated major cost savings, called it “a gift that keeps giving”
- Tried to expand and was blocked by restrictive township zoning
- Frustrated by local interference despite state and federal support
- Sees solar as practical, not political, and key to sustaining family farm



### Herm Cvetan

*Lawrence County Farmer*

- Joined 18 neighbors to lease land for solar project
- Project blocked by township solar ban despite landowner support
- Income would have helped cover taxes and farm upkeep
- Opposition fueled by misinformation about siting and views
- Stresses property rights, “As long as it’s my ground ... I’ll do what I do with it”



# Policy Recommendations for Pennsylvania

## Pass Statewide Siting Legislation

- Enact a clear, consistent framework for permitting energy projects that protects landowner rights and streamlines approvals.
- Establish a state-level backstop authority (such as [HB 502- RESET Board](#)) to prevent unfair local bans while continuing to consult with municipalities.

## Protect Landowner Rights

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

## Provide Local Governments with Tools

- Develop and share model ordinances.
- Offer technical assistance so townships can adopt defensible, commonsense permitting rules.

## Ensure Community Benefits

- Encourage developers to sign Community Benefit Agreements and make Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILTs).
- When possible, direct revenue to schools, emergency services, and rural infrastructure.

## Conclusion

Pennsylvania's farmers need practical tools to keep land productive and in the family— and state policy needs to support that. Clear, fair siting frameworks can protect