

Farmers vs. Renewable Energy - Where Does the Farm Bureau Really Stand?

Before we dive into this hot potato of a topic, let me be crystal clear: this article isn't about stirring the pot with rural landowners, farmers, or Farm Bureau organizations—whether they're local, state, or national. Now, don't get me wrong—I'm not here to ruffle feathers or stir up trouble. Instead, my goal is to open up a constructive dialogue and offer some food for thought.

This article seeks to humbly highlight the importance of not only opposing renewable energy developments within local, county, state, and/or federal governmental frameworks but also making a genuine effort to understand organizations like the Farm Bureau and their positions. After all, how can you win a game if you don't know the rules or the playbook? This article aims to provide insight into the American Farm Bureau's position while also exploring how the stance and actions of state-level Farm Bureau affiliates may differ. Think of it like comparing recipes from different kitchens—sometimes the ingredients are the same, but the flavor can vary wildly depending on who's cooking and how much seasoning they're adding.



AFBF's Stance on Renewable Energy

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) is all about energy independence. Their recipe for success includes a mix of conventional energy like oil and natural gas and renewables like solar, wind, and biofuels. It's a little bit of everything—a buffet, if you will. Their stance is simple: diversify energy sources, reduce reliance on foreign oil, and give farmers a chance to cash in on new opportunities.

But here's where things get a bit sticky. Some farmers look at this renewable energy expansion and feel like the turkey at Thanksgiving dinner—they're the ones being carved up. These farmers argue that we're losing too much farmland to energy developments and that the AFBF's policies lean a little too far into the energy game at the expense of agriculture. It's like betting the farm on a shiny new tractor while the barn is falling apart.

Diverging State-Level Perspectives

While AFBF's national stance provides overarching guidance, state-level Farm Bureaus often like to march to the beat of their own drum when it comes to renewable energy development. Take Ohio, for example. Dale Arnold, the Ohio Farm Bureau's go-to guy for all things energy and utility-related, has seemingly been cheerleading for renewable energy projects like it's Friday night at a high school football game. And here's the kicker: this happens despite his and the Ohio Farm Bureau's official public stance of so-called neutrality. Neutral? Sure. And my tractor's actually a Ferrari.

Arnold's credentials include a stint as the Chairman of Green Energy Ohio, a group that's essentially the PR team for renewable energy in the state. Oh, and by the way, Green Energy Ohio gets funding from—you guessed it—the Ohio Farm Bureau. Now, you'd think this cozy relationship might raise a few eyebrows, and you'd be right. It's like saying you're "just friends" with someone while posting vacation selfies together on Facebook. Subtle, right?

This setup shines a spotlight on how state-level organizations can sometimes dive headfirst into renewable energy advocacy, leaving their national counterpart looking like the sensible one at the family reunion. And let's not forget the proxies like Green Energy Ohio—those sneaky middlemen are used to keep the rest of the membership blissfully unaware of what's really going on. Meanwhile, farmers are left scratching their heads, wondering if anyone's actually got their back.

Now, to be fair—or maybe just honest—this isn't a one-time thing. The Ohio Farm Bureau has a bit of a track record here. Despite waving the "neutral" flag high and

proud, the organization has been cozying up to groups like Green Energy Ohio for years. Throw in some funding support, and you've got farmers questioning whether neutrality is just another word for quietly picking a side. Oh, and don't get me started on their referrals to "recommended legal counsel." If that doesn't scream, "Hey, we're playing both sides," I don't know what does.

Here's the part that really gets people talking: Arnold's relationship with Green Energy Ohio came to a sudden and dramatic end after renewable energy opposition groups started connecting the dots. One day, he's the chairman; the next day, poof—he's gone. If that doesn't raise red flags about transparency, I don't know what will. It's like when your neighbor suddenly stops bragging about their new truck—something's up, and everyone's wondering what it is.

All of this leaves farmers asking the tough questions: Are state-level organizations really representing their interests? And if not, who's keeping them accountable? Because right now, it feels a bit like a game of hide-and-seek, and farmers are tired of being "it."

The Case for Farmer Advocacy

For farmers who oppose the expansion of renewable energy projects on farmland, influencing AFBF policy requires persistent and coordinated efforts. Here are key steps for those seeking change:

1. **Engage in Policy Discussions:** Show up and speak up. AFBF's policies are shaped by its members, so make your voice heard. And while you're at it, don't just take things at face value. Even if there's trust, it doesn't hurt to ask for a little verification now and then—just to keep everyone honest. Efforts here should also include diligent follow-up to ensure that concerns raised are being addressed and actions taken are aligned with what was discussed. Persistence and accountability are key to making sure your voice doesn't get lost in the shuffle.
2. **Build Coalitions:** Strength in numbers, folks. Find like-minded farmers and team up. There's power in collective voices, especially when backed by solid data and a clear message.
3. **Educate and Advocate:** Knowledge is power. Dive into the details—whether it's soil health, land preservation, or ecosystem impacts. And while you're at it, push for comprehensive soil studies before any renewable project breaks ground. It's about setting the standard and holding people accountable.
4. **Leverage Public Awareness:** Engaging with local communities and the media can help build public support for a more balanced approach. Of course, engaging with the media in a rural area can feel like trying to sell rain boots

during a drought—it's challenging and sometimes downright frustrating. But it's worth the effort when your story gets heard and your concerns resonate beyond the county line. Public awareness campaigns can shed light on the challenges farmers face and encourage broader discussions about land use priorities.

Bridging the Divide

The future of agricultural and energy policy lies in finding common ground. Farmers who oppose renewable energy projects on farmland must work tirelessly to ensure their voices are heard within AFBF's policy-making framework. Simultaneously, AFBF must acknowledge these concerns and strive to develop policies that safeguard agricultural land while advancing renewable energy goals. Finding common ground requires recognizing that while property rights should be valued and defended, they are not absolute. Sure, you might love your slice of heaven, but the reality is we all have to share the sandbox. A little give-and-take goes a long way, and compromise doesn't have to be a dirty word. Tackling this issue head-on with a respectful, community-wide discussion can turn even the most stubborn stalemates into workable solutions—or at least make the coffee breaks more tolerable.

By advocating for a balanced approach, farmers and AFBF can collectively ensure that energy and agriculture—two pillars of rural America—coexist harmoniously, securing a prosperous future for generations to come.

As a final note, I encourage you, the reader, to trust but verify everything I have shared herein. Perform your own due diligence, dig into the details, and don't just take my word for it. I am, after all, human and prone to error. That said, I feel more than confident that what I've presented here is accurate and worth your consideration. The more informed you are, the stronger your voice will be in these important conversations.