"Not Your Dirt, Not Your Decision"? Cute...Huh?

Yep! On my soapbox again - Long Article!

Ah, the “Not your dirt, not your decision” defense—one of the favorite talking points of Farm-To-Power and other renewable energy advocates who pretend to be pro-agriculture while gaslighting rural communities.

Groups like Farm-To-Power—yes, there are many others out there—are merely advocating for renewable energy development under the guise of sensitive topics such as “property rights.” They take advantage of the immense pride rural landowners have in owning and maintaining the land they so diligently work to provide for their families. They proliferate a false narrative to serve their corporate masters, raking in significant profits at the expense of our communities.

Although I have attempted, on now a number of occasions, to point out the fallacy of this false narrative by sharing my opinion—

- The Nuanced Nature of Property Rights in Ohio…
  https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15HNC3Z6o6/
  https://jwthompson.substack.com/p/the-nuanced-nature-of-property-rights
- Property Rights and the Founding Fathers - What It Means for Rural Communities
  https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1HLBXdG7Tc/
  https://jwthompson.substack.com/p/property-rights-and-the-founding

In this post, I am going to go one step further and provide my opinion as to why Farm-To-Power's narrative is bologna. I'm stepping into a somewhat taboo area, providing insights into what many of us already know to be true—but saying the quiet part out loud.

Here's the truth - modern agriculture doesn't stand alone—it's propped up by a massive safety net of taxpayer-funded subsidies, tax breaks, and financial relief. That's not a criticism—it's just reality. And once we acknowledge that, the "Not your dirt, not your decision" argument starts to fall apart.

We all want farmers to succeed. We value agriculture. We like knowing that we have a strong, independent food supply. But if we're helping to pay for it, then yeah, we do get a say in how it's used.

Over $500 Billion in Farm Subsidies—We Are Happy To Help, You're Welcome

If American farming really ran on pure, old-school, bootstrapped independence, then why have we funneled over half a trillion dollars into it in the past 30 years?

Farm subsidies are not just a safety net—they are a core part of the agricultural economy. Without these payments, many farms would struggle to remain profitable, especially in years with extreme weather conditions, trade disruptions, or fluctuating commodity prices.

Think of farm subsidies like a financial cattle chute—they guide the agricultural economy in the direction policymakers want while preventing farmers from straying too far into financial ruin.

From 1995 to 2023, farmers collected $522.7 billion in federal subsidies. That's billion with a "B."

Source: Environmental Working Group. "Farm Subsidy Database." Environmental Working Group, 2023 - https://farm.ewg.org/progdetail.php?fips=00000&page=states&progcode=total

In 2023 alone, taxpayer-funded farm subsidies were projected at $10.3 billion (down from $16 billion in 2022).

Source: Taxpayers for Common Sense. "2023 Farm Subsidies Expected to Drop from Recent Record Levels." Taxpayers for Common Sense, 2023. https://www.taxpayer.net/agriculture/2023-farm-subsidies-expected-to-drop-from-recent-record-levels/

Farmers claim independence, but these numbers say otherwise. If the government is bailing out farms year after year, then taxpayers absolutely have a right to be involved in land-use decisions that affect communities.

Tax Incentives and Personal Use – A Double Standard?

One of the biggest arguments in favor of unrestricted land use is that private landowners should be able to do whatever they want with their property. But here's the reality—many farmers benefit from tax incentives, exemptions, and subsidies that reduce their financial burden at the expense of taxpayers. That's not inherently wrong, but it does complicate the idea that farmland decisions should be entirely private.

Beyond CAUV (discussed later), the federal government provides additional tax benefits that aren't available to the average homeowner or small business owner.

- Property Tax Reductions – Special tax rates on farmland keep costs low for farmers while other landowners pay full market rates.
- Depreciation Write-Offs – Farmers can deduct the cost of equipment, barns, and irrigation systems faster than standard businesses can.
- Estate Tax Exemptions – Agricultural land passed down to family members is often exempt from estate taxes, making it easier to keep farms within families.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, *Farmers and Ranchers Tax Guide: Agricultural Tax Benefits*, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p225.pdf

The classic "it's my land, I should be able to do whatever I want with it" argument is a fair point—if it weren't for the mountain of taxpayer-funded tax breaks, subsidies, and incentives that make farming a really sweet deal when tax season rolls around. Let's be real - farming is one of the most tax-advantaged professions in America, and many of those perks have some pretty flexible applications.

Farm Vehicles – The Most Versatile "Equipment" Ever

If there's one thing that makes farming financially unique, it's the sheer number of ways vehicles, equipment, and tools can be written off as "business expenses"—even when they spend a whole lot of time doing non-farm-related activities.

Farms genuinely need trucks, tractors, ATVs, and utility vehicles for daily operations—but let's not pretend that every piece of equipment is exclusively dedicated to agricultural work. Anyone who's spent time in a farming community knows that some of these so-called "business investments" spend just as much time hauling boats, campers, and side-by-sides as they do hauling feed.

Trucks: The Kings of Creative Write-Offs

It's no secret that farmers love big trucks—and the best part? The tax code loves them back. Thanks to Section 179 of the IRS tax code, farmers (and other business owners) can immediately deduct the full cost of "heavy-use" vehicles, rather than depreciating them over several years. The catch? The vehicle must be used at least 50% of the time for business purposes.

So, what does that mean in practice? A farmer can buy a brand-new F-350, claim it's "essential for farm operations," and—boom—write off 100% of the cost, up to $1.16 million in 2024. In reality, that same truck somehow magically appears at the lake every weekend towing a boat… but sure, let's say it's primarily for hauling hay.

Of course, these purchases always come with ironclad justifications. "Gotta haul livestock" (spoken by the guy with six backyard chickens and a cat). "Need it for feed and seed" (yet the truck bed has never seen a single grain of corn, but it does have a really nice tonneau cover). "It's for pulling farm trailers" (and yet, 90% of the time, it's hooked up to a fifth-wheel camper).

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Section 179 Deduction Vehicle Guidelines, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/publications/p946

ATVs and Side-by-Sides: Checking Fence Lines… or Trail Riding?

ATVs and side-by-sides are legitimate tools on many farms—they help check fence lines, transport feed, and navigate large properties. But let's be honest: how many of these taxpayer-subsidized "work" vehicles end up tearing up a local off-road park on weekends or doubling as hunting rigs?

The IRS allows farmers to deduct the cost of ATVs, UTVs, and off-road vehicles under farm equipment expenses—as long as they are "primarily used for agricultural purposes." Officially, these vehicles are needed for fieldwork and efficiency. Unofficially? Monday through Friday, they're "essential farm tools." Saturday and Sunday? They're "essential for seeing how deep this thing can go in the mud."

Plenty of these ATVs are supposedly purchased to "check fence lines," yet somehow, they spend more time checking out deer blinds than actual fencing. Others are "necessary for getting around the farm" but mostly seem to be necessary for ripping donuts in the snow while hauling a cooler in the back.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Depreciation of Business Equipment and Farm Assets, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/publications/p225

Farm Fuel Tax Exemptions – Gas That Magically Never Makes It Into Farm Equipment

Did you know that farmers can buy fuel tax-free for "off-road use" vehicles? That means diesel for tractors, combines, and irrigation pumps comes with a nice government discount—which is great for actual farming… but is also highly tempting for topping off other vehicles.

Farms can purchase dyed diesel (untaxed fuel) at a much lower cost than standard diesel, but legally, it's only supposed to be used for farm equipment and off-road vehicles. The catch? Not all of it ends up where it's supposed to. The farm's fuel tank behind the barn? Yeah, let's just say some of that diesel mysteriously finds its way into pickup trucks, too. And if a Department of Transportation (DOT) officer rolls into town? You can bet that some farm trucks are suddenly getting parked behind the grain bins.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Fuel Tax Exemptions for Agricultural Use, USDA, 2023 - https://www.usda.gov/agriculture-tax-incentives

The Magical "Home Office" Deduction – Farming from the Recliner?

Farming is hard work—no doubt about it. But apparently, a lot of that work gets done from the comfort of a "home office" that just happens to include a big-screen TV, a leather recliner, and maybe even a beer fridge.

Thanks to the IRS home office deduction, farmers can write off a portion of their mortgage, property taxes, insurance, and utility bills—as long as they have a space in their home "exclusively used for business." Now, we all know plenty of farmers who actually use their office for bookkeeping, planning, and farm management. But we also know a whole lot of home offices that double as man caves, gaming rooms, and places where "business" mostly consists of checking the weather and watching football.

How to Turn Your Den Into a "Business Expense"

The IRS allows farmers to deduct a percentage of their home expenses based on the size of their home office. In theory, if 10% of the house is used for business, then 10% of the home's expenses can be deducted. Sounds fair, right? Well, in reality, things get a little fuzzy.

Take the classic "converted spare bedroom" home office. Sure, it has a desk and maybe even a filing cabinet, but let's be honest—it's also where the kids play Xbox, the dog sleeps, and where the printer is mostly used for printing off deer tags and discount coupons.

And then there's the basement command center, where dual monitors are set up, "for tracking commodity prices," but somehow one screen is always on ESPN. Some of these offices even have a sectional couch, surround sound, and an upgraded Wi-Fi router—because obviously, faster internet is critical for checking market trends… and watching Netflix.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Home Office Deduction Guidelines, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/home-office-deduction

Office Supplies: Business Essentials… or Personal Perks?

Of course, every home office needs supplies—which is why farmers can deduct office furniture, computers, printers, and other "business-related" expenses. But let's just say that some of these purchases are doing a little more than just handling farm records.

A brand-new MacBook Pro? "It's for tracking farm finances" (Reality: It's also for watching YouTube tutorials on smoker recipes). A high-end color printer? "It's for invoices" (Reality: It's for printing out Little League schedules and Christmas cards). Noise-canceling headphones? "I need to focus on spreadsheets" (Reality: They block out the sound of kids fighting over the PlayStation in the next room).

And then there's the subscription game. If you can convince the IRS that a particular service is "essential for farm management," you're in business. A cell phone plan? That's a given. But what about streaming services like Hulu or Netflix? "They help me unwind after a long day on the farm" (Reality: They're also helping you binge-watch Yellowstone every night).

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Deducting Business-Related Expenses, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/publications/p535

Internet and Utility Bills – Because Farm Emails Need High-Speed Streaming?

One of the best perks of the home office deduction? A portion of household utilities—like electricity, water, heating, and internet—can also be deducted. And while every farm does need reliable internet for managing accounts, checking commodity prices, and staying connected, we all know that a whole lot of that "business-use" bandwidth is being spent on Amazon orders, fantasy football, and YouTube rabbit holes.

And if that wasn't enough, some farmers go all-in on upgrading their "business equipment" to make sure their "office" is as efficient as possible. Need an excuse for a generator upgrade? Boom—home office deduction. That new ergonomic chair? Gotta have it for those long hours managing spreadsheets (Reality: The chair is also perfect for napping). A state-of-the-art security system? Well, that's just being responsible… and also keeping porch pirates from stealing those latest farm "business" deliveries.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Business Use of Home: What Qualifies?, IRS, 2023 - https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/business-use-of-your-home

Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) – Ohio's Hidden Farmland Subsidy

One of the most overlooked yet significant subsidies benefiting farmers in Ohio is the Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) program.

This program allows farmland to be taxed at a significantly lower rate than residential or commercial property, effectively shifting the tax burden onto homeowners and small businesses while farmers enjoy huge property tax discounts.

How CAUV Works

CAUV bases farmland taxes on agricultural value, not market value, meaning that a 200-acre farm could be taxed as if it were worth $300,000, even if its market value is $2 million.

According to the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, CAUV results in hundreds of millions of dollars in lost property tax revenue annually, forcing counties to adjust levies and increase taxes on non-farm landowners.

Many Ohio residents are unaware that they are essentially subsidizing farmland owners through higher property taxes on their own homes and businesses.

Source: Ohio Legislative Service Commission, The Fiscal Impact of CAUV on Ohio's Local Tax Base, State of Ohio, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/reports/cauv

Crop Insurance & Agricultural Disaster Relief – Your Tax Dollars at Work

One of the biggest taxpayer-funded safety nets in agriculture is the federal crop insurance program and agricultural disaster relief payments. These programs, often presented as "risk management tools," function as a backstop for farms, shielding them from financial losses that every other business in America has to absorb on their own.

Imagine if every small business had insurance guaranteeing they wouldn't lose money—regardless of bad weather, economic downturns, or poor planning. That's essentially what taxpayer-funded crop insurance provides to farmers.

<u>How the Crop Insurance Program Works</u>

The Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP) is administered by the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and underwritten by private insurance companies that receive subsidies to cover farmers' policies.

- The federal government covers about 60% of the cost of farmers' crop insurance premiums, significantly lowering the financial burden on producers.
- In 2023 alone, taxpayer-funded crop insurance subsidies cost $11.5 billion.
- Indemnity payments (payouts from insurance claims) exceeded $19 billion in 2022, the second-highest level in history.
- Most crop insurance policies guarantee revenue, not just crop yields, meaning that even if market prices drop, farmers can still be compensated for lost profits.

<u>How Crop Insurance Influences the Use of Herbicides, Pesticides, and Fertilizers</u>

While there is no explicit federal law requiring farmers to apply herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers to receive crop insurance, the structure of the program strongly incentivizes their use.

1. Good Farming Practices (GFP) Requirements

To qualify for federal crop insurance, farmers must follow "Good Farming Practices" (GFP) as defined by the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA).

- GFPs are based on conventional agricultural standards—which almost always include chemical inputs like herbicides, pesticides, and synthetic fertilizers.
- If a farmer fails to apply recommended herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers, and their crop suffers losses as a result, their insurance claim may be denied.
- What qualifies as a "Good Farming Practice" is often determined by university extension programs, agribusiness research, and local insurance adjusters—most of whom promote conventional, chemically intensive methods.

2. Insurance Adjusters and "Proper" Farming Practices

- Insurance adjusters evaluate whether a farmer applied "proper" pest control, weed management, and fertilization practices before approving claims.
- If a farmer loses a crop due to weed overgrowth, insect infestation, or nutrient deficiency, and they did not use "acceptable" inputs (like herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers), their insurance may not cover the loss.

3. Industry and Academic Influence on Insurance Requirements

- Crop insurance programs often use university extension recommendations and agribusiness research to define "Good Farming Practices."
- These recommendations almost always include synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides as "best management practices."
- As a result, farmers are highly incentivized to apply these inputs, even if they might otherwise seek to limit their use.

4. Barriers to Alternative and Regenerative Farming Practices

- While the USDA does offer an Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) and some organic crop insurance policies, these are less common and have stricter yield and loss requirements.
- Farmers who use regenerative or organic methods—like reduced pesticide use, no-till farming, or natural fertilizers—often face difficulty getting insured or are subject to higher scrutiny by adjusters.

- If a farmer practices non-chemical weed control or alternative fertilization methods, but their yield suffers, their claim could be denied because they didn't use "recommended" chemical inputs.

Why This Matters to Taxpayers

Unlike homeowners or business owners who pay full price for their insurance, farmers get deep discounts—paid for by taxpayers.

- In some cases, crop insurance subsidies cover up to 80% of a farmer's premium, meaning the cost of protecting their revenue is nearly risk-free compared to insurance in other industries.
- Many farmers receive insurance payouts higher than their total input costs, meaning they profit even when they have a "bad year."
- The system incentivizes high-risk farming practices—like planting on marginal land that is prone to drought or flooding—because losses are guaranteed to be reimbursed.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance Programs, USDA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.rma.usda.gov/
Source: Environmental Working Group, Farm Subsidy Database: Crop Insurance Subsidies, EWG, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://farm.ewg.org/progdetail.php?fips=00000&page=states&progcode=cropinsurance

Agricultural Disaster Relief – When Taxpayers Cover the Bill

In addition to subsidized insurance, the USDA and FEMA provide billions in direct payments to farmers through disaster relief programs.

- When natural disasters occur, farmers can apply for low-interest emergency loans and direct payments through USDA disaster assistance programs.
- The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) compensates farmers for livestock losses due to extreme weather, disease, or predator attacks.
- The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) reimburses farmers for repairing damage to agricultural land after floods, droughts, wildfires, or other disasters.

The Reality of "Disaster Relief" in Agriculture

Unlike homeowners and small businesses, who often struggle to receive insurance payouts or disaster aid, farmers have a well-funded safety net that ensures they don't face significant losses.

- In 2021, Congress passed an additional $10 billion in ad-hoc agricultural disaster relief payments due to weather-related losses.
- Some farmers rely on disaster relief as a business model, planting in high-risk areas knowing that if the crop fails, the government will cover the loss.
- Farmers are frequently bailed out by taxpayers for droughts, floods, and wildfires, while other industries must absorb the cost of natural disasters on their own.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Disaster Assistance Programs, USDA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery/disaster
Source: Congressional Research Service, Federal Disaster Assistance for Agriculture: Policy Overview, CRS, 2023. Accessed February 2025.

https://crsreports.congress.gov/

Publicly Funded Infrastructure – The Backbone of American Agriculture

Farming might seem like a self-sustaining, independent business, but the reality is that it's deeply dependent on public infrastructure—infrastructure that taxpayers fund and maintain. Roads, railways, irrigation systems, and drainage projects aren't privately built by farmers; they exist because the public has invested in them for generations.

Yet, when land use debates arise—especially regarding industrial solar projects—some farmers insist that only landowners should have a say in how that land is used. But if the public is footing the bill for so much of the infrastructure that keeps these farms running, doesn't that mean taxpayers should have a voice too?

Let's take a look at how public infrastructure makes modern agriculture possible—and why this conversation needs to be more honest.

The Roads and Highways That Keep Farming Moving

Ever seen a tractor-trailer loaded with grain or livestock barreling down a rural highway? Those roads didn't just appear out of nowhere. They were built, maintained, and repaired with taxpayer money—at the local, state, and federal levels. In fact, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) puts more than $50 billion a year into roads, bridges, and highways, a significant portion of which directly supports agricultural transport.

Source: Congressional Budget Office, "Federal Highway Funding: Allocation and Spending Trends," 2023 - https://www.cbo.gov/publication/highway-funding

It’s not just highways, either. Local roads, often heavily used by farming equipment and transport trucks, are funded by property taxes and fuel taxes. But here’s the thing—farmers don’t pay more for the extra wear and tear their heavy equipment puts on these roads. Homeowners and small businesses share the cost, even though they don’t use these roads nearly as much.

So if the public is paying to make sure farmers can get their crops to market, is it really fair to say the public has no stake in how that farmland is used?

Railways, Ports, and Barge Traffic—All Subsidized for Agriculture

If you think all of America’s grain, soybeans, and corn move by truck, think again. Railroads and barges are critical for moving bulk agricultural products, and guess what? They’re heavily supported by public money.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) estimates that subsidies for rail and barge transportation save farmers hundreds of millions of dollars every year (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, "Grain Transportation Report," 2023). Meanwhile, the Army Corps of Engineers spends about $7 billion annually maintaining inland waterways, making sure barge traffic keeps flowing smoothly for agricultural exports.

Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "FY2023 Civil Works Budget Overview," 2023 - https://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Budget/ Source: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, "Grain Transportation Report," 2023 https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/transportation-analysis

Without these public investments, transporting grain, soybeans, and other commodities would be a whole lot more expensive—and a whole lot less efficient.

And yet, when it comes to deciding what farmland should or shouldn’t be used for, we hear the same argument: “It’s private land. The public doesn’t get a say.” But that land is part of an interconnected system that relies on taxpayer-funded infrastructure, so shouldn’t the people funding that system have a seat at the table?

Irrigation and Water—A Publicly Subsidized Necessity

If there’s one thing no farm can survive without, it’s water. And in many places, access to irrigation water isn’t just a matter of luck—it’s made possible by publicly funded water management programs.

Take the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, for example. This agency has pumped billions of dollars into irrigation projects over the decades, providing below-market-rate water to farmers across the country. Then there's the EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which helps fund water conservation projects that benefit agriculture.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "WaterSMART Grants Overview," 2023 - https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/
Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Clean Water State Revolving Fund Annual Report," 2023 - https://www.epa.gov/cwsrf

And it's not just about getting water to farms—it's also about managing runoff and preventing pollution. Taxpayers fund programs that clean up farm-related water pollution, like phosphorus and nitrogen runoff that contributes to algae blooms in places like Lake Erie. In 2014, agricultural runoff led to a massive toxic algae bloom that forced the city of Toledo to shut down drinking water for 400,000 people.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey, "Understanding Harmful Algal Blooms in the Great Lakes," 2023 - https://www.usgs.gov/centers/glsc/science/understanding-harmful-algal-blooms-great-lakes

So while farmers rightfully depend on these programs, there's an inconvenient truth: if taxpayers are paying to protect and provide water resources for agriculture, those same taxpayers have a legitimate interest in how farmland is used.

Flood Control and Drainage—Public Investments That Keep Farmland Usable

Ever wonder how farmers keep their fields from flooding after heavy rains? The answer isn't just good land management—it's taxpayer-funded flood control projects.

The Army Corps of Engineers spends billions on levees, reservoirs, and drainage systems to protect farmland from flooding. Many state-funded drainage districts maintain tiling and ditch systems that drain excess water from fields, ensuring crops don't drown.

Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "National Levee Database and Flood Risk Management Overview," 2023 - https://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Levee-Safety/ Source: National Association of Conservation Districts, "Drainage Districts and Public Watershed Investments," 2023 - https://www.nacdnet.org/policy/watershed/

And when disaster strikes? The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) steps in to help farmers repair irrigation ditches, levees, and other water control structures—with taxpayer money.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Emergency Conservation Program Fact Sheet," 2023 - https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/emergency-conservation/index

Farming, in many cases, wouldn't be possible without these publicly funded programs. So when farmers say, "It's my land, my decision," maybe they should consider just how much of their operation depends on public investment.

None of this is to say that farmers don't work hard. They do. None of this is to say that agriculture isn't critical. It is. But what it does say is that farming is not a purely private enterprise.

The reality is simple:

- Farmers rely on publicly funded roads, railways, and barge transportation to move their goods.
- They depend on taxpayer-funded irrigation systems, drainage projects, and flood control measures to keep their fields productive.

Government-Funded Watershed Management Programs

To protect water quality while ensuring continued agricultural productivity, the federal and state governments spend billions on watershed conservation and management. These programs help reduce runoff, prevent flooding, and clean up agricultural pollution.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the Clean Water Act Section 319 Program, which provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually to states for watershed cleanup, much of which is required due to agricultural runoff from nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial assistance for farmers to implement best management practices (BMPs) to reduce runoff and pollution, like cover cropping, riparian buffers, and controlled drainage systems.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds watershed cleanup efforts in the Midwest, especially in areas like the Maumee River Basin, which feeds into Lake

Erie—where toxic algae blooms caused by agricultural runoff regularly require millions in taxpayer-funded remediation efforts.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program, EPA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.epa.gov/nps/319-grant-program-states-and-territories
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS Conservation Programs Overview, USDA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/

Publicly Funded Drainage and Flood Control Systems

In many states, rural drainage and flood control aren't privately funded by landowners, but rather through taxpayer-funded state and federal projects.

The Army Corps of Engineers spends billions on flood control projects that protect farmland and rural communities from excessive rainfall and river overflow.

State and local governments operate drainage districts, which fund taxpayer-supported tiling systems, ditches, and levees that farmers depend on to keep their fields from flooding.

Yet, when it comes to land use decisions, many of these same farmers—who directly benefit from publicly managed and taxpayer-funded water control projects—argue that the public has no say in what happens on their land.

Toxic Algae Blooms – Cleaning Up After Agriculture

If you live in the Midwest, you've likely heard about Lake Erie's algae problem. It's not a mystery where it comes from—excess phosphorus from farm fertilizers runs into the watershed, leading to toxic blooms that contaminate drinking water.

In 2014, Toledo's drinking water was shut down for days due to a massive toxic algae bloom caused by agricultural runoff.

Since then, Ohio taxpayers have footed the bill for tens of millions of dollars in cleanup efforts, all while farmers continue to fertilize fields and contribute to runoff problems with little regulation.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey, Understanding Harmful Algal Blooms in the Great Lakes, USGS, 2023. Accessed February

2025. https://www.usgs.gov/centers/glsc/science/understanding-harmful-algal-blooms-great-lakes

Federally Funded Education & Workforce Development for Agriculture

It's not just landowners and farms getting government support. The agriculture industry benefits from federally funded scholarships, grants, and workforce development programs—all backed by taxpayer dollars.

USDA and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Scholarships & Grants

- The USDA 1890 National Scholars Program provides full-ride college scholarships for students pursuing agriculture-related degrees at 1890 Land-Grant Universities.
- The National Needs Graduate Fellowship Program funds graduate degrees in agricultural sciences, food security, and rural development.
- The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) trains new farmers with federally backed grants to cover startup costs.

Land-Grant Universities – Built with Federal Funds

Many of the nation's top agricultural colleges were literally built with taxpayer dollars. The Morrill Act of 1862 established the Land-Grant University System, giving states federally owned land to establish colleges that would focus on agriculture and mechanics.

- Schools like Ohio State University, Texas A&M, and Purdue University all receive millions annually in federal research funding to advance agricultural science.
- Federal research dollars develop new fertilizers, disease-resistant crops, and precision farming techniques—all of which benefit farmers at taxpayer expense.

Farm Bill Workforce Training & Extension Programs

Every five years, Congress passes a Farm Bill, which includes millions in workforce training grants for agricultural businesses and USDA extension programs that provide free technical assistance to farmers on topics like soil management and pest control.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, NIFA Grants & Fellowships for Agricultural Education, USDA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants
Source: Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, Land-Grant Universities:

History & Funding Overview, APLU, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.aplu.org/land-grant-universities

Undocumented Labor in Agriculture—The Hidden, Publicly Funded Workforce

The agricultural industry relies heavily on undocumented immigrant labor, with estimates indicating that 50-70% of all farmworkers in the U.S. are undocumented.

How the Agriculture Industry Benefits from Undocumented Workers

Many farms hire undocumented workers because they provide a cheap, expendable labor force willing to work in conditions that many American workers refuse to tolerate.

- The H-2A Visa Program allows farms to bring in temporary foreign laborers when local workers aren't available, but many farms still hire undocumented workers under the table to avoid wage regulations.
- Agricultural businesses benefit from lower wages while shifting the societal costs—like healthcare, education, and emergency services—onto the taxpayer.

Publicly Funded Services Used by Undocumented Agricultural Workers

While undocumented workers pay some taxes (like sales taxes and payroll taxes if they are paid formally), they also use a significant number of public services funded by taxpayers without paying into them in the same way as legal citizens.

1. Healthcare – Taxpayer-Funded Emergency Medical Care

By federal law, hospitals cannot deny emergency medical treatment to undocumented individuals, meaning Medicaid and other public health programs often cover their medical costs.

California and a handful of other states now provide state-funded health insurance for undocumented agricultural workers, further shifting costs onto taxpayers.

2. Education – Free Public School for the Children of Undocumented Farmworkers

Under the Supreme Court's 1982 Plyler v. Doe decision, children of undocumented immigrants must be allowed to attend public schools, which are funded by state and local taxpayers.

Many rural school districts in agricultural areas struggle with overcrowding and strained resources due to the influx of farmworker families.

3. Housing Assistance & Social Services

Many undocumented farmworkers live in government-subsidized housing programs funded by the USDA's Rural Development program and HUD Section 8 housing.

States with high numbers of undocumented workers allocate additional state tax dollars to provide housing, food assistance, and community outreach programs to migrant farmworker families.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Labor and Immigration Policy Overview, USDA, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/
Source: Pew Research Center, The Role of Undocumented Workers in U.S. Agriculture, Pew, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/undocumented-workers-agriculture

The Cost of Undocumented Labor to Taxpayers

While farm owners profit from lower labor costs, the burden of providing education, healthcare, and housing assistance to undocumented workers falls on taxpayers.

A 2023 Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) study estimated that taxpayer-funded services for undocumented immigrants cost U.S. taxpayers over $150 billion annually, with a large portion going toward agricultural laborers and their families.

States like California, Texas, and Florida bear the highest financial burden, spending billions on public assistance for undocumented agricultural workers.

Source: Federation for American Immigration Reform, The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on U.S. Taxpayers, FAIR, 2023. Accessed February 2025. https://www.fairus.org/issue/publications-resources/fiscal-cost-illegal-immigration

The Hypocrisy of Farm-To-Power's "Not Your Dirt, Not Your Decision"

When Farm-To-Power pushes its "Not Your Dirt, Not Your Decision" slogan, it conveniently ignores the fact that farming is, and always has been beloved and publicly supported industry. The land that farmers operate on has been shaped by decades of government investment, regulatory protections, and financial support.

If taxpayers are expected to foot the bill when it comes to disaster relief, infrastructure development, and direct subsidies, then they also have a legitimate stake in how that land is used—especially when the proposed use negatively impacts surrounding communities.

<u>Why This Matters for Renewable Energy Debates?</u>

This false property rights argument is often used to shut down opposition to large-scale solar projects. Yet, rural communities have every right to question whether leasing thousands of acres of farmland for industrial solar projects is in the public's best interest when:

- The land has been subsidized by taxpayers for generations.
- Solar developments are not traditional agricultural uses, but commercial if not industrial land uses.

These projects receive additional government subsidies, and privileges, that increase energy costs while reducing food production.

A Call for an Honest Conversation

The issue is not about denying farmers their right to make decisions—it's about recognizing the broader context in which those decisions are made. **If Farm-To-Power and other pro-solar advocacy groups truly believe in personal responsibility and market-driven decision-making, then they should also advocate for the removal of all taxpayer-funded subsidies, tax breaks, and bailouts that have sustained American agriculture for decades.**

But they won't. Because the moment they acknowledge that farmers have always benefited from public support, their entire argument collapses.

Instead of hiding behind false property rights narratives, it's time for an honest conversation about the real economic, environmental, and social consequences of industrial solar developments in rural America.

And that conversation belongs to all of us.