



ELLEN SCHUTT

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

COLUMN
March 1, 2024

Contact: Representative Ellen Schutt
(608) 237-9131

Protecting the Intention of the Farmland Preservation Program

Wisconsin is home to 14.2 million acres of some of the best farmland in America. Yet every year more and more disappears and is replaced by large-scale energy generating facilities. This is very concerning.

The farmland preservation program was created in the 1977 Wisconsin budget act to provide property tax relief to farmers and encourage local governments to develop farmland preservation policies. The land use requirement provisions of the program are to ensure that these tax credits are being paid only for farmland that is important to preserve for agricultural use.

Since being sworn into office in January 2023, the issue of large-scale solar energy facilities on precious farmland has come to fruition in my district, as well as across the state. In most circumstances, farmland that is used for a solar energy facility is leased out or purchased by a large foreign company, just as you would lease a portion of your home to a tenant. Many of these companies are based in Canada, Belgium, and the United Kingdom.

After discussions with state and local officials, it was determined that a loophole exists in current law that allows someone to claim the farmland preservation tax credit even after building an energy generating facility on part of the land. For example, if someone owns 1,000 acres in the farmland preservation program, and builds a solar energy facility on 500 acres of that, the person will still receive 100% of the farmland preservation tax credit. This is just wrong.

I introduced Assembly Bill 480 to prohibit a person from claiming the farmland preservation tax credit on the area of land that a person has commercial use solar. This bill will ensure that those who are receiving the farmland preservation tax credit are truly farming the land and preserving its soil for generations to come.

Installation of large solar panel systems permanently damage the land. The installation process requires wires to be placed underground, digging a minimum of four feet, displacing irreplaceable topsoil. This jeopardizes the future viability of growing anything on it.

Taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing energy projects under the farmland preservation program. My bill will make sure Wisconsin's farmland preservation program works as it was intended: to protect the land, allow Wisconsin's farms to be passed down to the next generation, and maintain our state's great agricultural tradition. I urge Governor Evers to sign this bill to protect the taxpayers and our precious farmland.