

June 23, 2021

House of Representatives
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Amended SB52 (House of Representatives)

Dear Chair Person Hoops; Vice-Chair Ray

My name is Annette and I am here with my husband Michael representing our farm, M HOUCK FARMS LLC. We own 258 acres in Highland and Clinton Counties. We are here today to oppose the Amended SB52 Bill and ask you to restore landowner decisions BACK to the landowner - NOT County Commissioners.

From the beginning, America has been the land of opportunity. It still is! We are a CAPITALISTIC society. FREE to do whatever we want within the constraints of the law.

Rural AMERICA. RURAL America is predominately an unzoned, farming area full of country charm, carisma and a beautiful view of hay, corn, soybean and wheat fields gently blowing in the breeze. At times the beauty is breath taking. AND, the SWEET, CLEAN smell. It is wonderful. AND, the farmers; always HELPFUL; they wave at strangers, stop and help stranded motorists, plow out snow-covered drive-ways - - ALL AT NO COST. BECAUSE, Farmers ARE nice people. Farmers give that cozy, community charm. No wonder, everyone loves to come out to the country and make it their home.

They want OUR way of life and what WE have created. As farmers, we took advantage of that. When we had ODD shaped corners or parcels that were hard to farm, sections that created "point" rows -- We surveyed it off and turned it into someone elses "Dream Home." We sacrificed unworthy parcels that were not completely productive for us anyway; so that we could be more efficient some other way or even buy better farmland. THAT is CAPITALISM!

AND, when we sold that small lot; we made no promissory note in that sale - that said - we are selling a guaranteed country view with that. We did NOT say that we are selling OUR country charm with that. We ONLY sold THAT LOT and NOTHING ELSE.

When a homeowner buys land in the country or builds a home in an unzoned ag area their contract does NOT include an agreement from area farmers saying they will give a wonderful view FREE of charge to all home owners. But apparently the 3-5-10-15 acre homeowners thought it automatically came with their purchase. Because NOW, they think they have a right to tell landowners what we can and can't do with our land. They want to have a VOICE. What they are asking for is RESTRICTIONS! (And YOU lawmakers appear to be listening to them and allowing this to become a "POLITICAL FOOTBALL.") I'm asking you to STOP THIS.

If they want RESTRICTIONS in an unzoned ag area, they should have thought of that before they invested their money. They should have built their home in a Subdivision with restrictions or bought a home in a gated community. Or better yet, they should have bought 200 acres and put their home in the middle of it and created their OWN COUNTRY TRANQUILITY.

INSTEAD - They are expecting area farmers to ALWAYS provide beautiful growing crop views and peaceful serenity FREE FOREVER and they expect YOU, our elected officials; to GIVE it to THEM. If this is what they are thinking; they are living in a Fantasy World!

Farmers have a right to use their land in whatever way they choose. CHOICE is the AMERICAN way! Just the same as the small acre homeowner chose to build in OUR unrestricted area. You can't just CHANGE the laws to suit your needs when you don't like seeing what the neighbor is doing.

Farmers receive government subsidies. WHY? It is our nations way to ensure production stays high and prices stay low. Subsidies are paid on products that store easily and can be traded internationally. (Giving the U.S. – Global Power and Strength.) In Ohio, farmers get subsidies on corn, soybeans and wheat. Farmers make up 1.3% of the employed US Population. Farmers do NOT gain wealth from subsidies; we just GET BY. We do NOT go on vacations, we do NOT have boats and campers in our garages. We work quietly and do NOT bother anyone. REMEMBER; we create a peaceful, serene environment in which others want to move in on US.

The farm bill's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has compensated farmers and landowners for taking highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive lands OUT of crop production and enrolling them instead in conservation practices. Through CRP, the (USDA) pays farmers to set aside land for grass or tree cover for a period of 10 or 15 years. This set aside period helps keep soil in place, reduce nutrient runoff, sequester carbon, and create beneficial wildlife and pollinator habitats. As quoted from FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux "CRP is a powerful tool for implementing voluntary, measurable conservation outcomes to mitigate the impact of climate change," "Nearly 21 million acres currently enrolled in the program prevent the equivalent of more than 12 million tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere." USDA's current May 2021 goal was to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program.

The 2021 CRP general signup period opened on January 4, 2021 and was set to close on February 12, 2021. BUT on February 5, USDA extended the general signup period to July 23rd, because fewer farmers were re-enrolling their land into the program. In my opinion; it is because farmers need MORE money than the incentive payout offered for the program which ranges from \$80-\$300/acre. Far less than Solar Lease Payouts/acre.

In 1998; Highland County had 22,973 acres in the set aside program. By 2014 this acreage had decreased to 15,306 acres and NOW in June 2021, it is at its lowest level of 11,455 acres. Meaning that farmers ARE NOT re-enrolling their land into conservation practices; because they can't afford to. At a time, when we need no-till and carbon sequestering more than ever: Solar Farming gives a much more SUSTAINABLE and viable financial option to the farmer than the Government CRP-Program and it SERVES the SAME PURPOSE and OFFERS SO MANY MORE BENEFITS!!! With a much HIGHER Payout to the farmer/landowner with the benefit of CONSERVATION & ENERGY Production in mind! It is a 2-Fold WIN!

Solar Farms are a form of CRP. Instead of a 15 year CRP program; the ENERGY PRODUCING PERIOD set aside of 30+ years: helps keep soil in place, reduce nutrient runoff, sequester carbon, and create beneficial wildlife and pollinator habitats. (We can welcome back the earth worms, butterflies, honey bees, birds, snakes and insects that we have run off from the use of our pesticides and toxic chemical sprays.) And the Solar Companies will pay us and actually save tax payer dollars instead of the government funded CRP. Taking it one step further; when DECOMMISSIONED, these same farms could actually enter back into production as CERTIFIED ORGANIC farms if properly pursued.

DEVALUATION of Land. Non-participating neighboring homeowners argue their homes will be devalued. WE are not making ANY MORE Land. Our POPULATION is growing. In my lifetime, I have never seen property lose it's value unless you find toxic fuel tanks under ground. ALSO, if solar panels ADORN my land; my land VALUE with a Solar Contract on it - will INCREASE my property value. If you stop my Solar Farm Operation opportunity; you will be DEVALUING MY LAND - DEVALUING MY BUSINESS. This argument WORKS - BOTH WAYS!!!

There are 287,973 farm acres in Highland County. Currently, there are 5 Proposed Utility Scale Solar Farms for Highland County. Willowbrook 1726 acres; Highland 3300 acres; New Market 1116 acres; Dodson Creek 1462 acres; Palomino 2400 acres. A TOTAL of 9968 acres. It stands to reason that if Highland County had almost 23,000 acres in set aside in 1998 and OUR current set aside is ONLY 11,455; AND farmers need greater incomes; then the estimated 10,000 acres for proposed ENERGY USE is QUITE DO-ABLE and badly needed from a Conservation standpoint. We could actually use more! It would ONLY be Approximately 4% of our county farm land acreage and MORE than that amount of acreage was previously in set aside, anyway in 1998. When the Federal Government has extended the CRP enrollment deadline because they need MORE CRP enrollment THEN IT PROVES Solar Opposition IS JUST WRONG when they say we are using up PRIME FARMLAND - They are just WRONG!!!

Highland County became the first conservation district in Ohio on April 18, 1942. As quoted from the Ohio Farmer magazine, "The conservation problem here in Ohio and the Corn Belt was not the wind erosion that had so dramatically defined the problems of the Dust Bowl across America's Great Plains. The damaging issue in the Midwest was water erosion that was creating gullies so big they could hide a truck or a tractor.... As the farmers and conservationists took on these challenges, they literally transformed agriculture across this country, making it a model for the entire world to follow...."

In 1935, Hugh Hammond Bennett, (NC native and soil erosion expert) led the efforts in the creation of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS). NOW known as NRCS-Natural Resources Conservation Service. As this legislation was created, Ohio authorized the formation of Conservation Districts. Highland County submitted its petition to the newly formed SCS Committee on March 25, 1942 making it the very first Ohio County in this Conservation Program. SEE: <https://www.farmprogress.com/conservation/ohio-establishes-first-conservation-district-highland-county> for the FULL ARTICLE. Highland County initiated what is NOW known as the (SWCD) Soil and Water Conservation District.

MANY of the descendents of these pioneer conservationist efforts have signed their farms into Solar Agreements. Proving, once again, farmers in Highland County are fore-runners on establishing practices that need instituted in Ohio. I URGE you to STOP making Solar a "Political Football." You are attempting to PASS the Landowner Rights to County Commissioners to establish Solar Permission at the LOCAL LEVEL and it is JUST NOT THEIR responsibility. This responsibility IS my landowner RIGHT and you will be creating a political mess at a local level. If the County Commissioners realized the turmoil you will be putting them in; they would be here opposing this bill and yet they are NOT; because they do NOT even realize the "STORM" that you are creating HERE with this proposal. Landowners ARE and always HAVE shouldered the responsibilities of our stewardship decisions. Passing this bill; will create county elected official havoc.

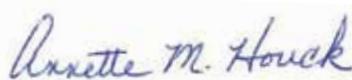
As a farmer and a resident of Highland County, I believe the landowner/farmer knows our land and the best usage for it - BETTER than ANY elected official. PLEASE allow us to do OUR JOBS and ONCE AGAIN move forward AS STEWARDS of the land in a Conservation Effort that simply LOOKS DIFFERENT!!! Solar Farming will enable us to produce energy AND practice conservation at the same time AND get paid from someone OTHER than a Federal Government Assistance Program.

Lastly, I want to thank you for your service as a lawmaker. It would be APPRECIATED if you would thank a FARMER TODAY especially a Conservation Farmer by allowing us to keep our property rights IN TACT by VOTING NO on this Amended SB52 Bill and NOT ALLOW County Commissioners to make OUR decisions.

Thank You for your time,



Michael G. Houck



Annette M. Houck

M HOUCK FARMS LLC

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