

IN-DEPTH: Resistance to Wind Energy in Two Wisconsin Towns Targeted by CCP-Backed Company

‘The state, federal, and foreign interests are directly attacking our friends, our neighbors, and families in these beautiful towns.’



Wisconsin town residents gather at a Farmalnd First meeting to discuss the

issue of wind farms proposed in their rural communities, in 2024. (Courtesy of Olivia Klemm)

A wind company backed by an entity of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has taken the first step to sue two small Wisconsin towns in response to their effort to pass ordinances written to protect residents' health and safety.

But those local communities are fighting back.

"Our resistance is spreading like a turbine fire," Martin Machtan, an attorney and executive director of Farmland First, told The Epoch Times.

Farmland First is an organization that aims to facilitate discussion among community members concerned about the reported coercive, predatory tactics used by industrial wind and solar companies to manipulate landowners into signing their property rights away in the name of green energy.

"These large-scale wind and solar projects do not happen without trillions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer funds and foreign capital," Mr. Machtan said. "The U.S. government, foreign governments, and private equity also cannot build large-scale wind and solar without externalizing enormous health, safety, environmental, and decommissioning costs onto residents, towns, and counties."

With the help of Farmland First's advocacy, 16 towns in central Wisconsin passed [health and safety ordinances](#) in the spring of 2023 that set ground rules for companies seeking to build wind turbines up to 600 feet tall and as close as 1,250 feet from their homes.

The resolutions were written to mitigate the harm wind turbines have been reported to cause people, their land, and their natural environment, including wildlife.

Marathon Wind Farm (MWF)—named for its construction in Marathon County, Wisconsin—responded by filing a notice of claim against two towns: Eau Claire, which has a population of around 750, and Brighton, with a population of approximately 600.

MWF is an EDP Renewables (EDPR) project.

MWF called for the wind ordinances passed by the local towns to be "repealed immediately" because they are "unlawful" and said they would cause "severe damage to wind energy systems."

The company cited Wisconsin statute 66.0401, subtitled, "Regulation relating to solar and wind energy systems," which states that "no political subdivision" may pass ordinances that exceed the restrictions stipulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Mr. Machtan said what wind companies often fail to cite is the exception on which the towns are relying. The exception allows towns to pass restrictions that serve “to preserve or protect the public health or safety.”

He added that the PSC in the state is “pro-wind and pro-solar.”

“At least one county zoning administrator has said that it looks like the Public Service Commission rules regulating wind development in Wisconsin were written by the wind industry,” Mr. Machtan said.

Mr. Machtan said that the project is “almost universally unpopular,” and that much of his most useful information on the wind company’s business practices comes from those who have signed contracts, but now want out.

The purpose of the ordinances was not to stop the project, he said, but to protect the property values, health, safety, and the towns’ overall “rural way of life.”

The state and federal government, including the PSC, aren’t doing this, he said.

“It’s really hurtful to us,” he said. “The state, federal, and foreign interests are directly attacking our friends, our neighbors, and families in these beautiful towns.”

Martin Machtan, executive director of Farmland First, speaks at a community meeting in 2024. (Courtesy of Barb Machtan)

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‘A Trojan Horse for China’

By foreign interests, Mr. Machtan means the Chinese Communist Party, which he connected to EDP Renewables.

EDPR’s principal shareholder is Energias de Portugal, whose largest shareholder is the Chinese State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), according to Market Screener.

SASAC’s webpage, under “What We Do,” states that it “performs the responsibilities mandated by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.”

“We are really concerned about private equity and foreign governments taking significant control of some of the best tillable land in the world,” he said. “These contracts transfer so much control of the land from the landowner or farmer to the company that holds the contracts that this almost feels like a Trojan horse for China buying local farms in many ways.”

Rep. Bill Posey (R-Fla.) blamed President Joe Biden's 2021 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for the incursion, which gives tax credits to not only domestic but also foreign companies for wind and solar projects.

"Unfortunately, due to massive loopholes ripe for fraud and abuse, China is flocking to North America to take advantage of the tax incentives authorized in the IRA," Rep. Posey was quoted as saying in a 2023 Forbes report. "Congress did not pass these tax credits to help boost China's economy."

However, according to Mr. Machtan, those tax credits are a "huge giveaway" to China.

Wisconsin community members gather to hear their options at a Farmland First meeting, in 2024. (Courtesy of Barb Machtan)

'Already at a Breaking Point'

Isaac Orr, a policy fellow with the Center of the American Experiment—a free enterprise, limited government, and personal responsibility think tank—told The Epoch Times that one of the priorities for Republicans, if they retake the House and the Senate in the presidential election, needs to be the repealing of wind and solar subsidies found in the IRA.

"I call it the Inflation Production Act because wind companies get \$27.50 for every megawatt hour of electricity that the wind turbines produce, so essentially we're incentivizing energy sprawl at a federal level."

Wisconsin is part of a 15-state electricity grid called the Midcontinent Independent Systems Operator (MISO), he said. The problem, he said, is that Wisconsin's electrical grid is "already at a breaking point."

"So, adding more unreliable generators isn't exactly a recipe for success," Mr. Orr said.

"Essentially, the agencies in charge of making sure the lights stay on at a federal level, like the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, identified the MISO grid as the most at risk of rolling blackouts in the near future because we're retiring too many coal plants and depending on unreliable sources like wind and solar. It's the Green New Deal for MISO, and it's not going to end well."

'A Frightening Prospect'

Both Eau Claire and Brighton have filed claims with their insurance companies, but because the projects are encouraged by state and federal government, those

towns are concerned that the insurance company attorneys won't vigorously defend the townships, Mr. Machtan said.

Electors of Eau Pleine asked Farmland First to promote a large turnout for an event to support town supervisors, he said, which took place last week.

"Litigation is a frightening prospect for town supervisors and chairs," Mr. Machtan wrote on his Substack page, on which he began documenting the events in 2024. "Those elected officials are accustomed to dealing with things like road maintenance, not lawsuits from aggressive global capital."

Mr. Machtan said the organization has pledged up to \$30,000 to support legal funds and to lend its team of attorneys to step in for the insurance company if they "aren't up for the task" of defending the towns.

Community members have come together to protest the wind project.

In one meeting last week, they crowded into a town hall to discuss the issue, prompting the local fire department to have to perform an emergency fire code assessment to determine its maximum capacity at 115.

"It's very rare for people to show up to these town meetings at all, but we are now having people come from other towns because if Brighton and Eau Pleine fall, the others could follow," he said. "There would be no protection."

'A Lopsided Fight'

Tom Wilcox is a member of Farmland First and chairman of the Town of Green Grove in Clark County, Wisconsin. He's also on the Clark County Board of Supervisors and chairman of the Clark County Planning and Zoning.

To boot, he's also a farmer and a tow truck driver.

A majority of what is involved in managing a town that size is buying gravel, grading roads—all of which are gravel except for the county roads—and plowing snow, he said.

"We haven't seen anything like this before, so it's a bit scary," Mr. Wilcox said.

"It's a fight that sure seems lopsided to me."

In February, Mr. Wilcox realized that if the wind company could go door to door signing people up who wanted turbines on their land, then he could do the same, only for people who *didn't* want turbines on their land.

"We call it the landowner's pledge," he said.

While not legally binding, it's a show of support for those who could be susceptible, such as his Mennonite neighbors whom he said are too friendly to tell them to "just go away and don't come back."

"When the wind company representatives return to their door, they can just say, 'Hey, I've already signed this pledge, so I can't possibly sign your contract,'" Mr. Wilcox explained.

It also documents the acreage of land owned by people who don't want turbines to show to lawmakers, he said.

Mr. Wilcox's goal is to get at least twice as many acres as what the wind company has signed up for in Clark County, which at this time is 11,000 acres. He currently has 17,000 acres of land owned by people who are opposed to the wind turbines, he said.

Tom Wilcox, a Wisconsin community leader and member of Farmland First, at an event in 2024. (Courtesy of Barb Machtan)

'A One-Way Street'

In anticipation of the inevitable proposal of joint development agreements (JDAs) with the towns, Mr. Wilcox has been working to ensure that the roads will be protected during construction, he said.

"These town chairs will probably enter into one of these contracts in their life, while the developers have more than likely done 10 in a week," he said. "Well, who do you suppose is better at negotiating their position?"

Where he's seen small towns get shafted is when the developer caps road damage in the agreement at a certain amount, he said.

Say a developer caps road damage at \$100,000, Mr. Wilcox explained. "By law, I can charge actual damages times three," he said.

It's called awarding triple damages, he said, because a lot of the time people don't realize that there's going to be more than what is what is compensated for in the agreement.

"I think towns and counties are going to realize they are much better off not signing JDAs that will likely allow the companies to collar their costs at the expense of taxpayers," he said. "We don't have wind farms here, yet, and when they do come, I don't want to learn this stuff too late," he said.

Because of Wisconsin's resource of sand mined for use in the petroleum, glass, and foundry industries, there are existing "nonmetallic mining" laws written to protect local and county governments so that when mines are closed, they can be reclaimed for use, whether it be for farming or construction.

Mr. Wilcox said there needs to be a clear reclamation plan from the wind companies.

Still, because many of the people involved in these contracts aren't farmers, they don't understand what kind of irreparable damage can be done to land, such as the removal of topsoil, he said.

"If there are no rules and you can come in and strip that black dirt, put it on a truck, and take it away, there's no way to reclaim that back into farmland," he

said. “That’s a one-way street, and I’m astounded that people don’t understand that.”

‘Shoved Down Our Throats’

The counties and towns are met with the same line when they appeal to their representatives in the state capital of Madison, Wisconsin: “We believe this is a local issue that needs to be settled on a local level,” Mr. Wilcox said.

“And yet when we do that, it feels like we get kicked in the teeth,” he said. “Even though I think there is a clear path for us to fix it at a local level, they get mad when we do.”

Overall, Mr. Wilcox said he feels the wind projects “are getting shoved down our throats.”

“And they think we’re a bunch of hillbillies who are just going to shut up and take it,” Mr. Wilcox said. “But I’ve met all kinds of people since I’ve been in Farmland First who I’ve never met before, and I can’t believe the intelligence and talent that they have.”

‘No One Is Listening’

Trine Spindler, a dairy farmer, is the Marathon County Chapter chair of Farmland First.

She’s also a native of Copenhagen, Denmark, where wind energy was pioneered.

Because Denmark is made up of islands, most of the turbines are in the ocean, she said, and they are having the same problems with them that coastal regions are facing in the United States with the destruction of marine life.

“It’s not necessarily with the whales but with fish populations leaving and our smaller, water-based life,” she said. “They’re actually trying to reestablish mussel colonies around the base of these turbines because they have disappeared.”

Wind turbines are “hugely unpopular” for the same reasons they are in the United States, she said.

Just as in the United States, there are different opinions, but when projects are planned in chosen areas, there’s always a fight over where they will go, she said.

“Now, Denmark is a lot more socialist than we are so government officials can put them where they want them to a certain extent,” she said. “The wind industry is backed over 50 percent by the government if not more, but, like here, local communities are fighting them.”

Denmark wants to have the reputation of being the greenest country, she said, and government officials have to have a certain amount of wind turbines installed to achieve this goal.

“But it’s just a game to look good in my mind,” she said. “I don’t think they’re actually doing anything good for the environment.”

For Ms. Spindler, one of the biggest issues is that the townspeople of Wisconsin aren’t being heard.

“We don’t get any help from legislators or the county boards,” she said. “We have a huge amount of people coming out from local townships who are 98 percent to 2 percent saying, ‘We do not want this.’ And no one is listening.” No one wants to speak out against green energy, she said, which is why she believes local media hasn’t given the cause a voice.

“We’re just regular people out here who are going to end up fighting these giant industries by ourselves and it’s scary and worrisome,” she said. “But we’re ready to take on the fight.”

The Epoch Times contacted EDP Renewables for comment.