



# Land Use & Farm Impacts

Farmland, rural communities, and open space across the country are being targeted for massive data center projects, often with limited public disclosure, nondisclosure agreements, rezoning battles, and promises of economic development that can permanently change a community's character, tax burden, and environmental health.

## KEY FACTS

1. **Farmers who are already struggling are being offered prices significantly higher than current land value.** Even if a farmer refuses to sell, the purchase of nearby land for data centers can raise **property values, rents, and property taxes**, making it harder for working farms to stay operational.
2. **Agricultural land is being rezoned from agricultural to industrial, often behind closed doors.** Data center developers are **increasingly targeting** rural and unincorporated areas, where rezoning procedures, land-use review, and public oversight may be weaker or easier to circumvent.
3. **Nondisclosure agreements keep communities in the dark.** The use of NDAs in data center development deals can allow data centers to be pushed through without an accurate assessment of environmental concerns and risks to the community.
4. **The land footprint of a data center is enormous.** According to the **World Resources Institute**, the **average data center site** in 2024 covered about 224 acres—roughly the size of 450 football fields.
5. **Farmland and natural ecosystems that are lost to data center development cannot be recovered.** Once productive soil is covered by concrete, buildings, roads, substations, utility lines, and other impervious surfaces, the damage to soil health, habitat, drainage, and groundwater can last for generations and contribute to broader climate concerns.

## QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

- What is the environmental impact assessment, and how will this be monitored and enforced?
- Who pays for the increasing costs of utilities?
- How can we protect farms and farmers and ensure these data centers are on less desirable land, away from communities and ranchers, reducing harm to the environment and children's health?

### Cautionary Example

In Box Elder County, Utah, the proposed Stratos Project shows how fast rural land can be swept into massive data center development. The project area was originally approved at approximately 40,000 acres of privately held land, split across three sites. After immense public backlash and pressure from state officials, the developer agreed to cut the footprint roughly in half, to about 20,000 acres. Residents raised concerns about land use, water, air quality, power demand, and impacts to the Great Salt Lake ecosystem, and later attempted to challenge the approval through a referendum. The county passed a 180 day moratorium on future data centers, but it sadly did not apply to Stratos because of the proposed facility's ties to the U.S. Military Installation Development Authority.

## Community Win

In Pittsylvania County, Virginia, the Southern Environmental Law Center helped residents fight a proposed 1,000 acre data center facility. The county board ultimately denied the rezoning application in April of 2025, successfully protecting rural land from being converted into a massive industrial site.



## Recommended Call To Action

Protect farmland before it is gone! Be alert to data center activities and proposals in your area utilizing resources like Erin Brockovich's data center tracker map. Local officials should not approve any data centers on viable or preserved land until residents have full disclosure, public hearings, and independent environmental review and impact studies. Communities should demand an end to NDAs, stronger public records laws, and local land use standards that put farms, families, and health ahead of Big Tech expansion.

## TOP THREE POINTS

1. We need to preserve viable farmland for food production
2. Rezoning practices, non-disclosure agreements (NDA's) and secret meetings are impeding the public's right to know and ability to act
3. Land impacts are larger than the footprint of the data centers themselves, they also involve the utilities needed to support the energy needs of the data center. For example the footprint of the solar or wind "farms" can exceed the size of the facility itself.

## SOLUTIONS

End NDA's and require clear information about water usage and wastewater disposal, energy requirements and who pays, air quality impacts, including steam from evaporative cooling and the heat generated from the data centers themselves, from gas or diesel generators used when local electricity is maxed.

Permitting at local level and full disclosure of land use, waste production, energy consumption.

**Example article from Ohio** - Limit NDAs, fix public records laws for data centers & other economic development<sup>5</sup>

Viable farmland should be off limits/ protected. Texas Farmers Union demands immediate halt to all data centers on farmland<sup>6</sup>

Solutions- Farmer Dustin found the Piedmont Environmental Council would pay him to put his land in conservation easement so it could not be developed.<sup>7</sup>

Solutions- from no till farmer.com<sup>8</sup>

1. Require brownfield sites
2. Convert abandoned housing if needed
3. Marginal cropland rather than top tier

Success/ in process- Wisconsin bill introduced to limit NDAs<sup>9</sup>

## SUCCESS STORIES

Southern Environmental Law Center, helped Pittsylvania County, Virginia, fight off a 1,000-acre AI facility.<sup>10</sup> SELC also helped prevent rezoning attempt in Virginia for 12 months.<sup>11</sup>

Hanover VA voted against rezoning agricultural land for a data center. Linn County IA passed an ordinance to limit data centers on unincorporated land.<sup>2</sup>

In Ohio, a proposal to rezone 300 acres of farmland to support data center development sparked such widespread opposition that the landowners ultimately withdrew their application.

1. <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/balancing-data-center-growth-with-american-agriculture>
2. <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2026/06/24/ai-data-center-boom-farmland/>
3. <https://www.wri.org/insights/us-data-center-growth-impacts>
4. <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/land-lines-magazine/articles/land-water-impacts-data-centers/>
5. <https://policymattersohio.org/research/limit-ndas-and-fix-public-records-laws-for-data-centers-and-other-economic-development/>
6. <https://www.austinchronicle.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/2026-SOB-AI-Data-Centers-and-Crypto-Currency-Mining-Centers.docx-2026-SOB-AI-Data-Centers-and-Crypto-Currency-Mining-Centers.docx.pdf>
7. <https://www.wvtf.org/news/2026-05-28/how-family-farmers-can-survive-as-land-is-lost-to-data-centers-and-developers>
8. <https://www.no-tillfarmer.com/blogs/1-covering-no-till/post/15096-data-centers-and-rural-land-destruction-hit-the-pause-button>
9. <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/related/proposals/sb969>
10. <https://ambrook.com/offrange/land/not-farming-data>
11. <https://www.selc.org/press-release/pittsylvania-board-of-supervisors-denies-balico-rezoning-application/?ref=ambrook>
12. <https://www.wri.org/insights/us-data-center-growth-impacts>