

The *Country Mill Farms* Case

Case Name: *Country Mill Farms v. City of East Lansing*

Status: On August 21, 2023, the Federal District Court ruled in favor of Country Mill Farms, allowing them to participate in the East Lansing Farmers Market



Significance: Whether the government can unlawfully exclude an individual's business from public events and punish their free speech, simply because they do not like the person's beliefs.

Background: Steve Tennes owns Country Mill Farms, where he was born and raised, and where he and his wife, Bridget, are currently raising their family. For seven years, the Tennes family had participated at the farmer's market in East Lansing, Michigan, which is located 22 miles away from them. In 2016, however, the city of East Lansing decided to punish them for their religious beliefs. Devout Catholics and military veterans, the Tennes family was asked via Facebook in 2016 whether they would use Country Mill Farms to host a same-sex wedding. The Tennes family happily serves everybody through their farm and at the East Lansing farmer's market, and they had done so for years. But when Steve replied that they would decline to host a same-sex ceremony because they believe that marriage is between one man and one woman, the City of East Lansing went out of its way to discriminate against the Tennes family. First, the City kicked the Tennes family out of the farmer's market and then crafted a policy aimed at keeping them out for their views. It took [a federal court order for the City](#) to reverse its decision and correct its unconstitutional policy, allowing Country Mill back at the farmer's market. A video on the Tennes family and Country Mill Farms is available [here](#).

Key Points

- East Lansing targeted Country Mill Farms' owner just for expressing his beliefs.
- Country Mill Farms serves all customers and did so at the farmer's market for several years.
- Country Mill Farms employs people from all walks of life, including those who identify as LGBT.
- The government can't require American farmers to give up their beliefs in order to run a family farm or participate in a farmer's market.
- The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled twice—first in *Obergefell* and then again in *Masterpiece*—that the government must respect the belief that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Key Facts

- East Lansing unconstitutionally crafted a new vendor policy even though Country Mill Farms is located in Charlotte, 22 miles outside of East Lansing's jurisdiction.
- East Lansing publicly praised Country Mill Farms, posting, "We love The Country Mill!" on its farmer's market Facebook page just weeks before the city began pressing them to leave the market.
- For more than a decade, Country Mill Farms has hosted "Pick a Peck for People," a program in which the community is invited to come to the farm and pick as many apples as possible that day, and all harvested apples are then donated to a local food bank.
- No American should be forced to change their beliefs in order to align with the government's views.

The Bottom Line: All Americans should be free to live and speak according to their deeply held religious beliefs without fear of government punishment.