



May 11, 2026

Dear Members of the Cave City City Council,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the future use of prime agricultural land for industrial or commercial use to construct a large data center in Cave City, Barren County. This proposed ordinance raises serious concerns about the permanent loss of farmland, long-term economic stability, environmental stewardship, and responsible growth in our county.

Prime farmland is one of our county's most valuable and irreplaceable resources. Without the benefit of conditional use protections, prime farmland loses its planning and zoning protections, it is effectively gone forever. This type of land is uniquely suited for food production and supports local farmers, agribusiness, and rural economies. Protecting it is essential not only for preserving our heritage but for ensuring long-term food security and economic resilience in the Commonwealth.

Kentucky is already experiencing an alarming loss of agricultural land. According to the most recent 2022 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, our state has lost approximately 546,000 acres of farmland in just the past five years—an average of nearly 290 acres per day. Over the last twenty years, Kentucky has lost roughly 1.4 million acres of farmland and more than 17,000 farms. Today, Kentucky has about 12.4 million acres in agricultural production, down from 13.8 million acres in 2002. The number of farms has declined from 86,541 to 69,425 during that same period. These are not abstract statistics. They represent real families, real livelihoods, and real economic activity disappearing from our communities.

When agricultural land is economically developed, we must be committed to ensuring that the development maximizes agricultural output. The proposed ordinance now before your body for approval would also set a troubling precedent. If prime farmland can be converted for a single large-scale industrial project, it will become increasingly difficult to deny similar requests in the future. Over time, this accelerates farmland fragmentation and loss, making it harder for current and future farmers to remain viable. Instead, I encourage your local legislative body and leaders to prioritize industrially zoned parcels for this type of development.

Economic development is important, but it must be balanced with responsible land-use planning. Barren County and Cave City should prioritize development in areas already zoned for commercial or industrial use, including brownfield sites or areas with existing infrastructure. Thoughtful growth ensures that we attract investment while protecting the agricultural base that sustains our community.





There are also significant concerns regarding the environmental and infrastructure impacts of large data centers. These facilities typically require substantial electricity and water resources, which can strain local utilities and place additional costs on residents. They can also generate increased traffic, noise, and long-term land disruption that affect nearby farms, homes, and natural ecosystems.

- I respectfully urge the Cave City City Council to avoid stripping of its protections or rezoning agricultural land for industrial or commercial use and instead adopt policies that:
- Protect prime farmland and agricultural viability
- Encourage development in appropriate, already-zoned areas
- Comply with established comprehensive planning and zoning development plans
- Support local farmers and farm families
- Consider long-term infrastructure, environmental, and water impacts

The decisions made today will shape your county and our Commonwealth for generations. Once farmland is gone, it cannot be replaced. I urge you to act with caution, stewardship, and a commitment to preserving the resources that define our community.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your careful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Shell  
Commissioner  
Kentucky Department of Agriculture

