

The 'Biogas' Plot: Fueling Factory Farms in the Midwest



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THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

Executive Summary

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One of the most sophisticated greenwashing and corporate welfare schemes ever designed, “manure biogas,” is providing Big Ag cover to use taxpayer dollars to fund a massive expansion of factory farms in the Midwest. The first thing to know about “biogas” is that the term itself is misleading. “Biogas,” also sometimes called “renewable natural gas” or “RNG,” refers to the use of methane digesters (also known as anaerobic digesters) to capture gas emanating from the cesspools of waste that concentrate on factory farms. These digesters process some portion of the waste from factory-farmed animals into fuel while also producing a polluting byproduct called digestate. **“Biogas” is more accurately described as factory farm gas, or FFG for short.**



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Industry has touted its use of FFG as a climate solution, but an investigation by Farm Forward released in parallel with this one documents that **FFG functions as a net negative by incentivizing the expansion of factory farming**, entrenching current factory farms and their worst practices (see [“Gaslit by ‘Biogas’: Big Ag’s Reverse Robin Hood Effect”](#)).

This Farm Forward investigation demonstrates how **Big Ag is effectively bringing its waste problem to the Midwest** by confusing legislators and the public with lofty talk of “biogas” or, as it is alternatively branded, “renewable natural gas” or “RNG.”

With industrial dairy at the helm, a coalition of utility and fossil fuel companies are making plans to entrench and expand factory farming’s most destructive practices: mass confinement of animals and manure cesspools (see “The 50-year Plot to Expand Factory Farming”).

At the center of this plan is FFG, which industry

plans to promote by a combination of deregulating digesters and manipulating clean fuel standards.

Industry has already introduced legislation in Michigan to deregulate anaerobic digesters and their waste byproducts (see “Deregulating FFG Pollution”), and to establish a new “clean fuels standard,” a credit trading scheme for polluters (see “Profiteering with Pollution”).

Michiganders are increasingly waking up to the industry’s plans, and **concerned citizens are resisting** and opposing the growth of CAFOs in their states (See “Michiganders Don’t Want to Pay Polluters”). However, **industry misinformation has led to considerable confusion about FFG**, even among policymakers and some environmentalists. **This report demonstrates that FFG is a clear case of egregious greenwashing. FFG threatens a massive misappropriation of public funds to expand a polluting industry deeper into America’s heartland.**





THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

Introduction

Introduction

The business model of industrial dairy is “expand, extract, and profit,” which relies on taxpayer subsidies and externalizing the cost of cleaning up its air and water pollution.¹ Over the past several decades, the dairy industry has steadily grown in the arid West—Idaho, Arizona, California—where it has successfully extracted billions of dollars of natural resources² while polluting the air and drinking water for millions of people.³

Now, as climate-driven drought and heat make Western states more expensive and risky to operate, the dairy industry is looking for a new home, and its sights are set on the Midwest.

Factory Farm Gas Explained

Our “Gaslit by ‘Biogas’” report explained the basics of factory farm gas (FFG), which we reproduce here for readers’ convenience:


FFG refers to a type of fuel produced from the digestion of animal waste—most often dairy cow manure, but also hog and poultry waste—as well as other agricultural waste products like animal carcasses.⁴ During this process, bacteria break down waste under oxygen-free conditions, creating a mixture of methane and other gases. This gas is then refined and injected into gas pipelines or used as transportation fuel. The industry masks the polluting origins of the gas by using the misnomer “renewable natural gas” or “RNG” to refer to FFG.

Anaerobic digesters are commonly installed above the industry’s manure cesspools on factory farms to capture the gas. They may also be housed in separate facilities where waste is trucked in for gas capture.⁵ Digesters can indeed reduce some manure-based methane emissions. **However, they do nothing to reduce dairy cows’ enteric fermentation, which is responsible for almost three times as much methane as manure.**⁶ They also do not make the animal manure disappear; instead, they put it through a chemical process that still leaves behind another byproduct: **digestate—a dangerous pollutant itself that requires careful handling.** This shifts but does not solve the basic environmental problem. However, FFG operations do not simply fail to solve all problems; they actively make the problem worse by pumping climate dollars into the expansion of factory farms.



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THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

The 50-Year Plot to Expand Factory Farming in the Midwest

The 50-Year Plot to Expand Factory Farming in the Midwest

Big Ag, fossil fuel, and major utility companies are executing a calculated, long-term strategy to dominate the Midwest for the next half-century. The plan? Use “green energy” initiatives, especially FFG, to fund the expansion of privately owned factory farms with public dollars. The Upper Midwest—particularly Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa—is the prime target, chosen specifically for its abundant freshwater, temperate climate, and politically favorable environment.

The industry’s plans are documented in its own playbooks. A 2018 *Journal of Dairy Science* publication reveals industrial dairy’s “vision for 2067,”⁷ which explicitly identifies the Great Lakes region as an area that will remain especially viable for dairy production as climate change intensifies. Michigan and northern Wisconsin have been noted as future “sweet spots” for industrial dairy operations.⁸

The strategy has unfolded as a web of strategic partnerships between factory farms, utility companies, and fossil fuel corporations. For example, DTE Energy is developing infrastructure⁹ to transport FFG from Wisconsin’s massive dairy operations¹⁰ into Michigan’s markets, utilizing existing natural gas pipelines. These companies are mimicking California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard program—a scheme that has generated huge profits for corporate interests while perpetuating factory farming under a thin veneer of environmental responsibility.¹¹

The irony is stark: **the industry significantly responsible for driving climate change is now positioning itself to exploit the regions that will remain habitable as the climate crisis worsens.** By establishing gas infrastructure and expanding factory farms now, these corporations aim to lock in their business model for decades to come, making it increasingly difficult to transition away from industrial animal agriculture.

The American Biogas Council, the main trade association for FFG, is not shy about its vision of locking in factory farming. It estimates a possible **near-5,000 percent surge in FFG operations** across Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois—cementing the Midwest as an epicenter of polluting agricultural

practices.¹² If evidence of the past few years is any guide, such a surge would be coupled with dramatically increased herd sizes.¹³ **This coordinated effort aims to secure corporate control over the region’s resources for the next 50 years, using climate policy as cover.** As these companies build out their infrastructure and deepen their political influence, they are creating a future where factory farming becomes increasingly difficult to dislodge.



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THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

Deregulating FFG Pollution

Deregulating FFG Pollution

Deregulation is a classic part of the playbook for industry expansion, and FFG is no different. Consider House Bills 5789 and 5790, sponsored by Michigan House Representative Joey Andrews (D). Together, these bills would scrap water regulations for digesters.¹⁴ If passed, these bills would make it cheaper and easier for factory farms to entrench since managing digestate, the polluting byproduct of producing FFG, is often a constraint for companies trying to build cesspools with digesters. Even USDA, which is led by former Big Ag dairy lobbyist Tom Vilsack, is highly supportive of FFG, warns about the risks of digestate as a pollutant, stating: **“land application of digester effluent, compared with fresh manure, may have a higher risk for both ground and surface water quality problems. Compounds such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and other elements become more soluble due to anaerobic digestion and therefore have higher potential to move with water”** [emphasis added].¹⁵

The legislation would effectively deregulate factory farm waste streams if they have a digester, despite the egregious water pollution associated with digesters. Michigan is a state already awash in animal waste—factory-farmed animals “generate 17 million more pounds of fecal waste **per day** than the state’s entire population of 10 million humans” [emphasis added].¹⁶ This wouldn’t be the first time a state tried to pave the regulatory way for FFG: a 2017 California provision allowed for industrial dairies with digesters to bypass typical environmental analyses.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the Michigan Farm Bureau is following California’s lead and, in its 2024 policy guidelines, supports “Registration of an anaerobic digester **without surface water or ground-water permits**” [emphasis added].¹⁸

Concerns over digestate water pollution were echoed by Michigan’s Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), noting the importance of protecting the drinking water of “millions of residents of the state.”¹⁹ Perversely, the proposed house bills would remove EGLE’s ability to regulate digestate and **“immunize digester operators against potential liability under NREPA even if they cause a harmful discharge” while applying digestate to land** [emphasis added].²⁰

An analysis of House Bills 5789 and 5790 from the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) argues that the proposed use of FFG may also violate Michigan and federal laws:

the Bills violate both Michigan and federal law, including a Michigan Supreme Court opinion decided July 31, 2024. The Bills also endanger Michigan’s delegated authority under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) to carry out its own National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems (NPDES) permitting program. **If passed, the Bills would further endanger Michigan’s already-threatened water resources** and potentially subject Michigan businesses to environmental oversight from federal regulators.²¹ [emphasis added]

By stripping away crucial protections, these bills would allow factory farms to pollute with impunity, turning Michigan’s waterways into dumping grounds and leaving communities to bear the cost. Deregulation isn’t a climate solution, but it is a completely predictable political goal for industries that want to expand their reach without oversight.





THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

Profiteering with Pollution

Profiteering with Pollution

One side of the coin of factory farm expansion is **deregulation**, and the other is **profiteering**. Factory farm interests²² have a long history of lobbying for taxpayer subsidies that enrich themselves. An ongoing battle in the Michigan legislature is a good example.

In early 2023, a group of Democratic state senators introduced a package of clean energy bills aimed at reducing statewide GHG emissions. The package included several bills passed by the end of the year in what was heralded as a “historic” investment by a state in fighting climate change.²³

However, one dangerous bill from that package has been stalled: SB 275, which proposed a new Clean Fuels Standard (CFS) modeled after California’s controversial Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS). One of the primary aims of SB275 is to incentivize the production of FFG from manure and other industrial waste streams using anaerobic digesters. A state “Clean Fuels Standard” would reward FFG producers with carbon credits that can be bought, sold, or traded for profit and used to “offset” Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHGs). This pollution trading scheme **allows GHG-emitting companies to claim net-zero status while continuing emissions-intensive operations unabated.**

As discussed in our co-released report, [“Gaslit by Biogas: Big Ag’s Reverse Robin Hood Effect,”](#) flawed methodologies assign dairy FFG absurdly low carbon intensity (CI) scores, empowering proponents to falsely assert that FFG is “cleaner” than truly zero-emissions renewable energy sources like wind and solar. These grossly exaggerated emissions reductions perpetuate the misleading narrative that factory farm pollution could benefit the climate. Predictably, like California’s LCFS, SB 275 adopts faulty emissions assessments, meaning FFG will appear “cleaner” on paper than it is in reality, inflating the value of its credits. SB 275 would effectively **monetize manure**, creating financial incentives for industrial dairy operations and FFG producers to move to the Midwest.

Clean Fuels Michigan (CFM), an industry trade association, is SB 275’s core backer.²⁴ Members of CFM include oil and gas companies like BP, major utilities like DTE and Consumers Energy, and companies like Darling,

whose business model is deeply intertwined with factory farms. For example, member companies DTE Energy and Consumers Energy have substantial investments in natural gas infrastructure and FFG. It’s unsurprising that companies would want a bill like SB275. The LCFS, the model for SB 275, was immensely lucrative for FFG interests, generating more than \$1.26 billion in revenue for energy and industrial farming companies in California.²⁵

Public Funds for Private Interests

As noted, SB 275 has stalled in the Michigan State Senate, likely due to vocal opposition from environmental organizations, sustainable farming advocates, and community groups. The bill may be reintroduced in a new form. Only time will tell.

However, factory farm companies have advanced their FFG goals through manipulation of the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF), a public entity created to support economic development. The MSF has the authority to issue tax-exempt Private Activity Bonds (PABs) to fund privately owned projects. The value of these bonds is substantial. Typically, the interest on private bonds is taxable, generating revenue for the state. In 2024, the MSF board unanimously **approved \$335 million in PABs to support FFG production from numerous dairy CAFOs in Michigan in partnership with large gas companies. Chevron Corporation received \$100 million, while BerQ US Investments, LLC was allocated \$235 million.**²⁶ BerQ is a member of the American Biogas Council. A typical bond of this size would generate millions of dollars in taxable revenue for the state of Michigan, and the total value of the bond for the companies involved will likely be tens of millions of dollars. Notably, the MSF October 22, 2024 Board Meeting Agenda²⁷ listed these resolutions to approve under “Support Small Businesses,” a totally inappropriate designation for a company like Chevron, which generated more than \$200 Billion in revenue in 2023,²⁸ making it one of the ten largest companies in the world.





THE 'BIOGAS' PLOT: FUELING FACTORY FARMS IN THE MIDWEST

Michiganders Don't Want to Pay Polluters/ Conclusion

Michiganders Don't Want to Pay Polluters

Despite the billions in profits that industry stands to gain from expanding FFG across the Midwest, this issue remains largely under the public radar—and it's clear the industry benefits from this anonymity. When MI voters learn about efforts to expand factory farms and FFG, they strongly oppose it. **A survey conducted for Farm Forward by Data for Progress found that Michigan voters want environmental organizations (64 percent), clean energy companies like wind and solar producers (62 percent), public health organizations (62 percent), and small family farms (59 percent) influencing climate policy as opposed to fossil fuel companies and factory farms (see the Appendix for the full results).** Also, after learning about the trade groups responsible for SB 275 (i.e., Clean Fuels Michigan) and reading language from both proponents and opponents of the bill, support for the bill plummeted from 52 percent to only 37 percent. **Michigan voters reject the idea that major industry polluters should benefit from lucrative public policy—including for FFG.**

Conclusion

In a presentation led by the former VP of Dairy RNG operations for DTE Energy, it was noted that a major purpose of investing in FFG is to rehabilitate the dairy industry: “It’s crucial that we continue to drive down the carbon intensity of American milk to dispel poor public perception about America’s dairy industry.”²⁹ It is clear that the push for FFG, through legislation like SB 275 or by raiding the Michigan Strategic Fund, is a means to lock in factory farms.

Food system reform stands at a crossroads. One path follows industrial animal agriculture’s vision: massive expansion of factory farms throughout the Midwest and long-term entrenchment of gas infrastructure. The other leads toward a more sustainable and humane future—one advocated by members of Congress,³⁰

environmental organizations, and citizens from both rural and urban communities. Factory farming is not inevitable, but the window for change is now. Instead of perpetuating a broken system, policymakers have the opportunity to lead a transformative shift toward a food system that is both humane and sustainable.



Endnotes

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- ³ Alexis Andiman and Kara Goad, “Pollution from the Largest, Dirtiest Meat- and Dairy-Production Facilities Worsens Injustice. We’re Calling for Change,” *Earthjustice*, December 13, 2022, <https://earthjustice.org/experts/alexis-andiman/pollution-from-largest-dirtiest-meat-dairy-facilities-worsens-injustice>.
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- ¹⁰ Food & Water Watch, *Factory Farm Nation: 2024 Edition*, September 2024, 9, https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/RPT_2409_FacFarmMapUpdate-WEB2.pdf
- ¹¹ The per-credit value of FFG in California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard has dipped significantly in recent years, leading to associated industries looking for new stock. See California Air Resources Board, *Low Carbon Fuel Standard Data Dashboard*. Last modified 2024.
- ¹² Using the American Biogas Council’s (ABC) website, we totaled the number of current FFG operations in Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and totaled the number of “potential” operations as estimated by the ABC. Then we calculated the percentage change.
- ¹³ Farm Forward, “FFG is Expanding Factory Farms,” in “Gaslit by Biogas: Big Ag’s Reverse Robin Hood Effect,” page 8, <https://www.farmforward.com/publications/gaslit-by-biogas>
- ¹⁴ Water permitting is one of the few ways to have some degree of oversight over the harms and externalities that factory farming has wrought on local communities.
- ¹⁵ The same source also states, “The digestate has increased potential for some air and nutrient emissions compared to raw manure (see Air Quality and Nutrient Availability considerations). Consider the need to incorporate additional equipment, processes or technologies that may be necessary or useful to treat digestate to reduce emissions and the potential for groundwater and surface water contamination during digestate storage and land application based on its intended use.” See United States Department of Agriculture, *Conservation Practice Standard: Anaerobic Digester (Code 366)*, Natural Resources Conservation Service, August 2023.
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- ²⁹ Mark Hill, *The Future of Manure Digesters in Wisconsin* (DTE, February 25, 2020).
- ³⁰ Farm Forward, *Farm System Reform Act: What it is and how to support it*, <https://www.farmforward.com/issues/food-policy/farm-system-reform-act/>.





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Read on for the results of a survey of Michigan voters regarding FFG, commissioned by Farm Forward and conducted by Data for Progress.





 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

Michigan Voters Want Environmental Voices Shaping Climate Policy, Instead of Big Polluters Like Factory Farms

By Grace Adcox and Isa Alomran

September 2024

Michigan Voters Want Environmental Voices Behind Climate Policy, Not Big Polluters

With the aim of meeting the state's ambitious climate targets under the Michigan Healthy Climate Plan, Michigan lawmakers have proposed [Senate Bill 275](#), which would establish a "Clean Fuel Standard" for the state. Some lawmakers have touted the bill as a climate win, given its intent to lower the carbon intensity of fuels used and establish a market for trading carbon intensity credits in Michigan. The bill, however, includes renewable natural gas, including biomethane, among a list of so-called clean transportation fuels, which are [not clean](#) and will delay decarbonization efforts in the state.

Despite the name invoking ideas of sustainability and natural inputs, [manure-derived biomethane is anything but](#). Biomethane is produced through a process of anaerobic digestion – a process which turns the copious amounts of manure collected from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) into methane fuel and other byproducts, including dirty runoff. Not only would this bill lead to water and air quality impacts in Michigan, but it would also reward companies in polluting industries with financial credits for turning waste into biomethane.

In a [survey](#) conducted with Farm Forward, Data for Progress finds that large pluralities of Michigan voters, at minimum, believe oil and gas companies and large factory farms have negative environmental and health impacts. Voters most want environmental organizations (64%), clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers (62%), public health organizations (62%), and small family farms (59%) involved in shaping and implementing climate legislation. In contrast, voters least want fossil fuel companies (48%), and large-scale CAFOs (40%) involved in climate legislation. Moreover, after learning information about the groups that influenced the creation of the Clean Fuel Standard bill and reading language from both supporters and opponents of the bill, respondents switched from 52% initial support for the bill to only 37% by the final assessment.

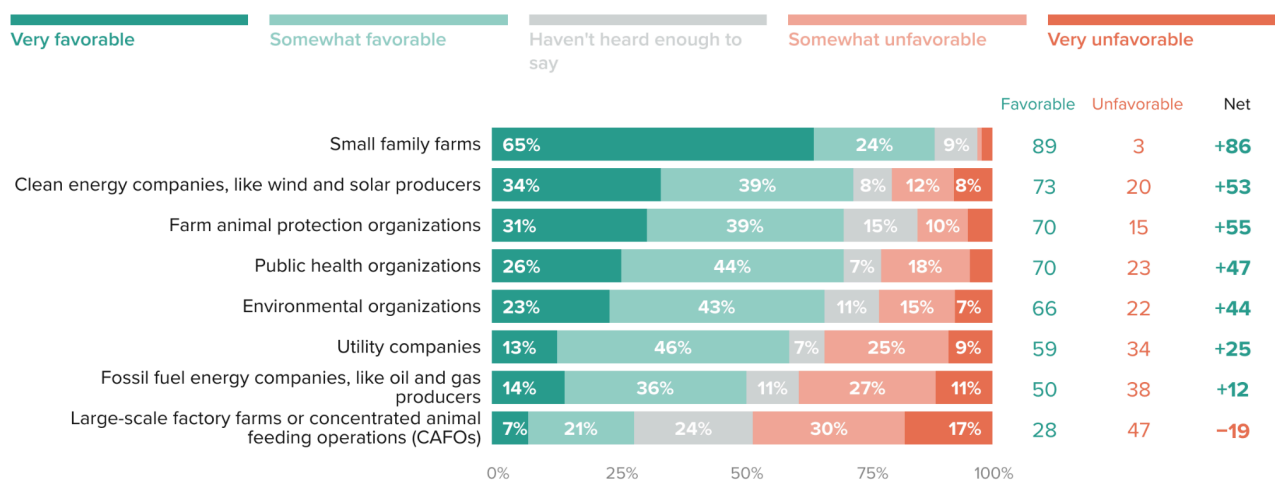
Additionally, the survey finds that almost three-quarters of Michigan voters (73%) support making polluters pay for damages from climate disasters, like wildfires, droughts, and floods. This includes strong bipartisan support, with majorities of Democrats (88%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (65%) in favor of making polluters pay for their climate impacts.

Michiganders View Polluting Industries Less Favorably, and Think They Have Negative Environmental and Health Impacts

Strong majorities of Michigan voters have favorable views of small family farms (89%) and clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers (73%), compared with just 28% and 50% who have favorable views of large-scale factory farms and fossil fuel companies, respectively. Notably, nearly a quarter of Michigan voters are not familiar enough with CAFOs to assess their views either way. Around two-thirds of Michiganders also hold favorable views of farm animal protection organizations (70%), public health organizations (70%), and environmental organizations (66%).

Michigan Voters Strongly Favor Small Family Farms and Clean Energy Companies, Contrasting With Views of Factory Farms and Fossil Fuel Companies

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following groups?



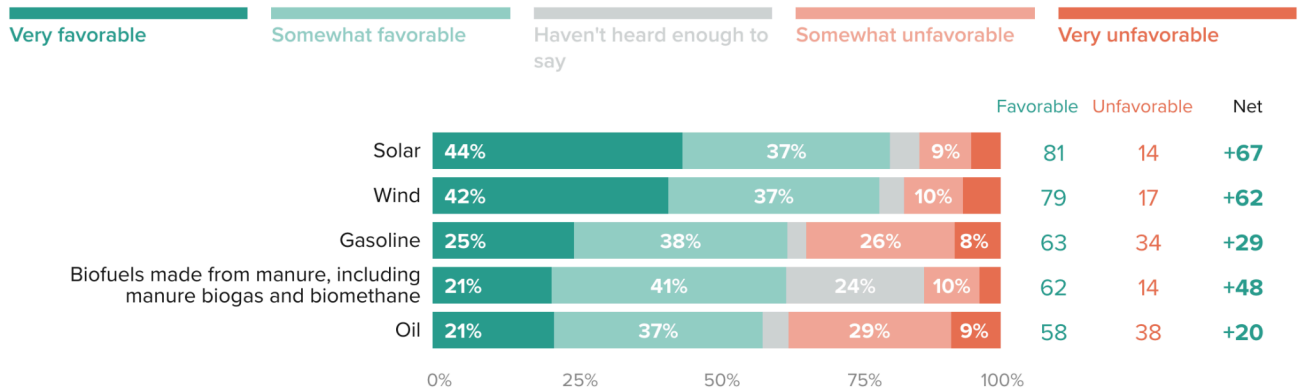
April 6–14, 2024 survey of 834 Michigan likely voters

FARMFORWARD DATA FOR PROGRESS

When asked about their views toward types of energy, Michigan voters strongly favor clean energy sources, like solar (81%) and wind (79%), over gasoline (63%), biofuels including manure biogas and biomethane (62%), and oil (58%). This contrast is most easily observed in the intensity of favorability, where pluralities of voters view solar (44%) and wind (42%) very favorably, while no more than a quarter say the same of gasoline (25%), biofuels, including manure biogas and biomethane (21%), and oil (21%). Importantly, we notice that, unlike other energy sources, about a fourth of Michigan voters haven't heard enough about biofuels to form an opinion.

Michigan Voters Favor Clean Energy Sources Over Fossil Fuels and Biofuels

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following energy sources?



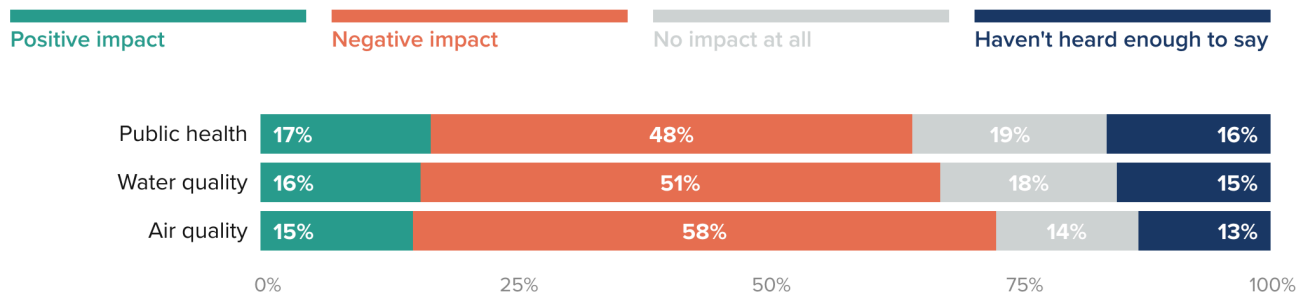
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FARMFORWARD DATA FOR PROGRESS

Next, respondents were asked to share their views about the specific impacts of industries on the local environment and human health. When considering the impacts of oil and gas companies, a majority of Michiganders believe that they negatively impact air quality (58%) and water quality (51%), while a plurality think they negatively impact public health (48%).

Michigan Voters Believe Oil and Gas Companies Have Negative Environmental and Health Impacts

Please say whether you think that **oil and gas companies** have a positive or negative impact on the following areas for Michigan communities or if you think they do not make an impact at all:



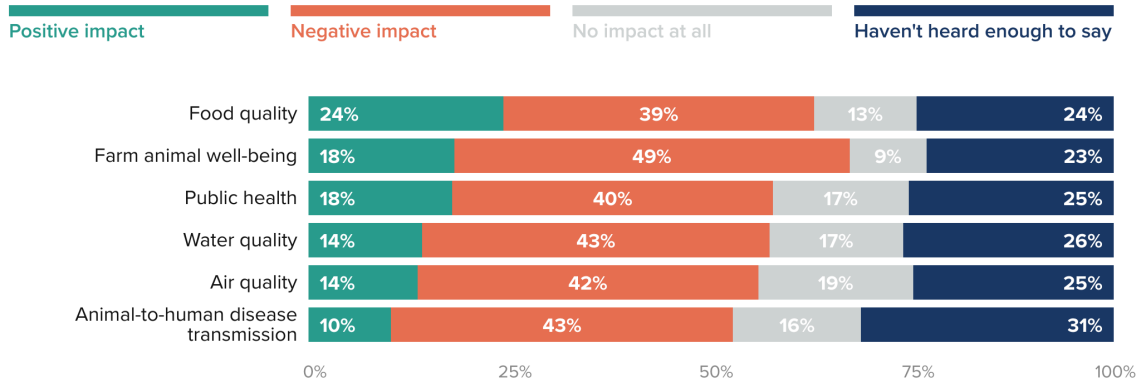
April 6–14, 2024 survey of 834 Michigan likely voters

FARMFORWARD DATA FOR PROGRESS

Similarly, pluralities of Michigan voters think large factory farms have a negative impact on farm animal well-being (49%), water quality (43%), animal-to-human disease transmission (43%), air quality (42%), public health (40%), and food quality (39%). Notably, compared to voter perceptions of oil and gas companies, a larger proportion of Michiganders “haven’t heard enough to say” what impact factory farms might have, indicating lower levels of voter awareness and knowledge of factory farms.

A Plurality of Michigan Voters Think Large Factory Farms Have Negative Impacts on the Environment and Both Human and Animal Health

Please say whether you think that **large-scale factory farms**, also known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), have a positive or negative impact on the following areas for Michigan communities, or if you think they do not make an impact at all:



April 6–14, 2024 survey of 834 Michigan likely voters

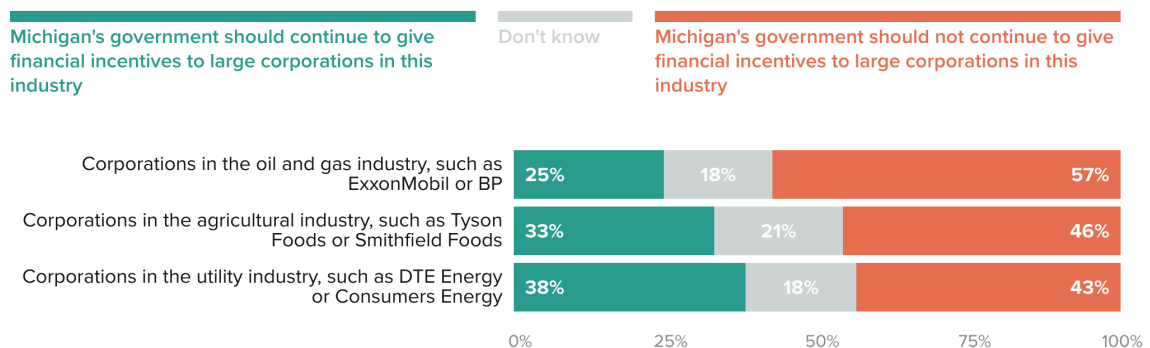
FARM FORWARD DATA FOR PROGRESS

Before introducing any information about the Michigan Clean Fuel Standards bill and specific incentives included within the bill, respondents were given a description of how state governments can provide financial incentives to support the growth and development of specific industries. They were then asked whether Michigan should or should not give such financial incentives to the oil and gas, agriculture, and utility industries. A majority of Michigan voters oppose the state providing incentives to oil and gas (57%), while a plurality oppose financial incentives for agricultural (46%) and utility companies (43%).

A Majority of Michigan Voters Oppose the State Government Providing Financial Incentives to Oil and Gas Companies

Governments use the income they generate from taxpayers to provide financial incentives, including grants, taxpayer-backed loans with favorable terms, or tax breaks, to companies in specific industries in order to support their economic development and growth.

For each of the following types of corporations, please say whether you think Michigan should or should not continue to give them financial incentives:



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Michiganders Support Climate Action, Want to See Trusted Actors Involved

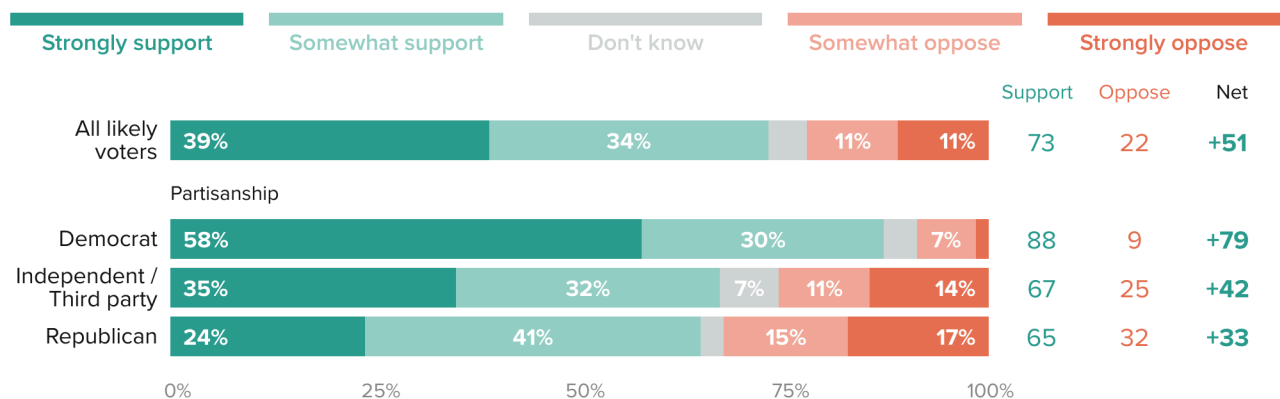
The next section of the survey solicited more general views on climate action. Respondents were given a short description of recent city and state efforts across the country to sue oil and gas companies to hold them accountable for the [costs of climate damage](#) and mitigation. Almost three-quarters of Michigan voters (73%) support making polluters pay for damages from climate disasters like wildfires, droughts, and floods. This includes strong majorities of Democrats (88%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (65%).

Michigan Voters Across Party Lines Strongly Support Making Climate Polluters Pay for Their Damages

Cities and states across the United States are paying billions of dollars to deal with climate disasters like wildfires, droughts, and floods.

Now, a number of those cities and states are suing oil and gas companies to make them pay their fair share of the damage their pollution has caused.

Would you support or oppose making polluters pay for climate damages?



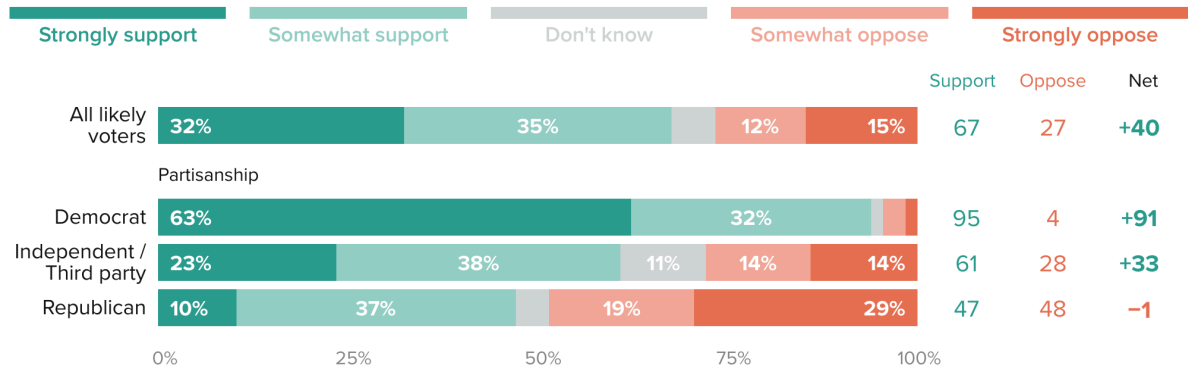
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On top of strong support for making polluters pay, more than two-thirds of Michigan voters (67%) support state legislators passing policies to address climate change. Democrats express near-universal support (95%) for implementing state climate policies, with a majority of Independents (61%) also in support. Republicans are split nearly evenly, with 47% who oppose climate legislation and 48% who support it.

A Strong Majority of Michigan Voters Support State Legislators Implementing Climate Policies

Do you support or oppose Michigan state legislators implementing policies aimed at addressing climate change?



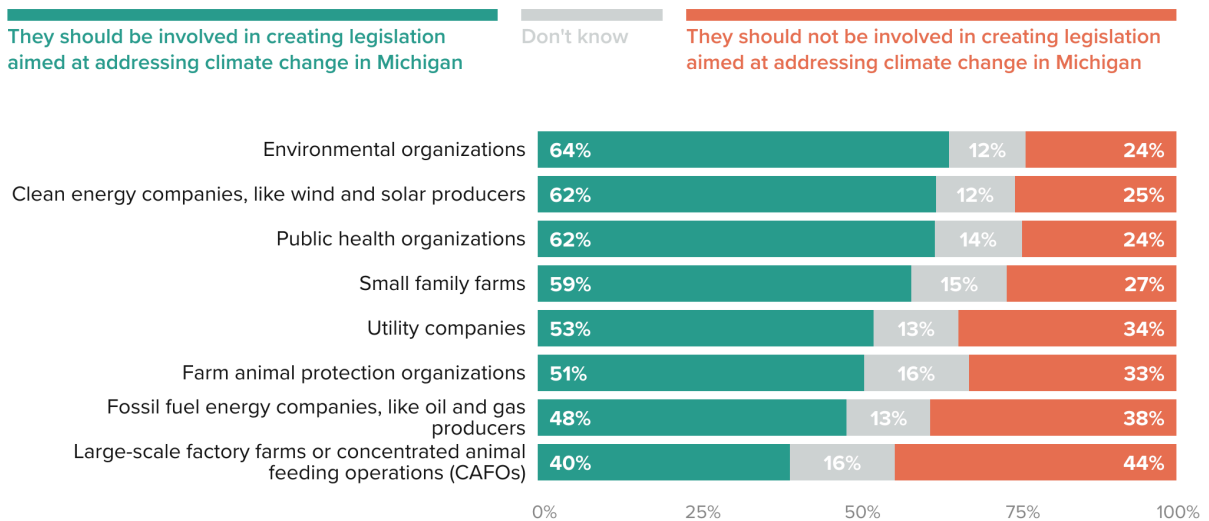
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When it comes to the process of how those bills are created, Michigan voters have clear views about the actors they most trust to be involved in shaping and implementing climate legislation. Michiganders most want environmental organizations (64%), clean energy companies like wind and solar producers (62%), and public health organizations (62%) involved in crafting climate policies. In contrast, voters least want fossil fuel companies (48%) and factory farms (40%) involved in climate legislation.

Michigan Voters Would Like to See Environmental Organizations Involved in Climate Legislation Along With Clean Energy Companies and Public Health Organizations

Do you think each of the following groups should or should not be involved in creating legislation aimed at addressing climate change in Michigan?



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Michiganders Oppose a Michigan Clean Fuel Standard Driven by Industry Lobbyists

Turning to the Michigan Clean Fuel Standard bill, respondents were next given a brief description of the proposed legislation, which aims to cut carbon emissions from transportation fuels by at least 25% by 2035 over 2019 levels. The bill would also create a system for tracking the carbon emissions from fuels produced in or brought to Michigan, and establish financial credits for companies for the fuels they produce that have lower carbon emissions than those of traditional fossil fuels.

After reading a basic description of the bill, a slim majority of voters (52%) support the policy, including a majority of Democrats (72%) and a plurality of Independents (47%). In a follow-up question, voters were then informed that agriculture, oil and gas, and utility companies influenced the bill's provisions, which include large financial incentives to those same companies for producing fuels, like manure-derived biomethane. After voters are given this additional information, topline support for the Clean Fuel Standard bill falls to 44%, including a 22-point drop among Democrats and a 7-point drop among Independents.

In the final assessment, voters read messages in support and opposition to the Clean Fuel Standard bill. The support statement focused on how the bill could help Michigan meet its goals for a healthy climate while lowering carbon emissions from fuels and generating targeted investments in cleaner fuel sources, while the opposition statement focused on the involvement of lobbyists from the oil and gas, utilities, and agricultural industries to ensure the bill would fund the production of polluting fuels and reward these same industries. After this question, support for the bill falls even further to 37%, with support dropping by another five points among Democrats.

These questions reveal as voters learn more information about the involvement of industry lobbyists in this climate policy, they switch from a majority in support of the bill (52% support, a +15-point margin) to a plurality in opposition to the bill by the final assessment (37% support, a -9-point margin).

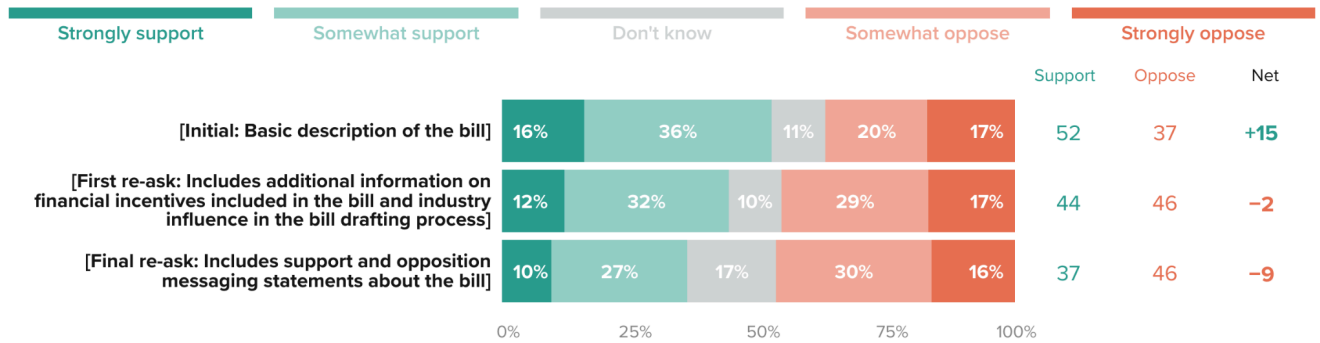
Initial Support for the Michigan Clean Fuel Standard Bill Drops After Respondents Read About Industry Influence and Messaging from Supporters and Opponents of the Bill

Michigan legislators have proposed a Clean Fuel Standard bill to cut carbon emissions from **transportation fuels** by at least 25% by 2035, compared with emission levels in 2019.

The bill would establish a system to track carbon emissions from fuels produced in or brought to Michigan. It would reward companies for producing fuels with carbon emissions lower than those of traditional fossil fuels by giving them credits for these fuels.

Companies could use or sell those credits for profit to other industries to satisfy legal greenhouse gas emission limits, even if they do not actually reduce the total amount of emissions they output.

Do you support or oppose this proposed bill?



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To understand which ways to talk about the bill with Michigan voters are most persuasive, respondents were next asked to review a series of messages and assess how convincing each is as a reason to oppose the bill.

Overall, two framings are considered convincing by strong majorities across partisanship. The first framing that is considered somewhat or very convincing by 73% of Michiganders overall, including 66% of Republicans, 68% of Independents, and 82% of Democrats, focuses on the bill’s potential impacts on the environment and public health, mentioning that awarding financial credits and using taxpayer dollars to produce biogas would “create more dirty runoff, contamination of drinking water, and emissions that pollute our environment.”

The other framing that is considered convincing by 71% of Michigan voters overall, including 62% of Republicans, 68% of Independents, and 82% of Democrats, compares allowing oil and gas companies to influence climate policy to allowing tobacco companies to be involved in healthcare policy, and states that Michiganders deserve environmental policies that aren’t influenced by these major industries that pollute the environment.

Michigan Voters Consider Messages That Link Fossil Fuel Influence Over Climate Legislation With Tobacco Influence Over Health Policy and That Focus on Environmental and Health Threats from Biogas as Effective

For each of the following messages, please state how convincing, if at all, each is as a reason to **oppose** the recently proposed Michigan Clean Fuel Standard bill:



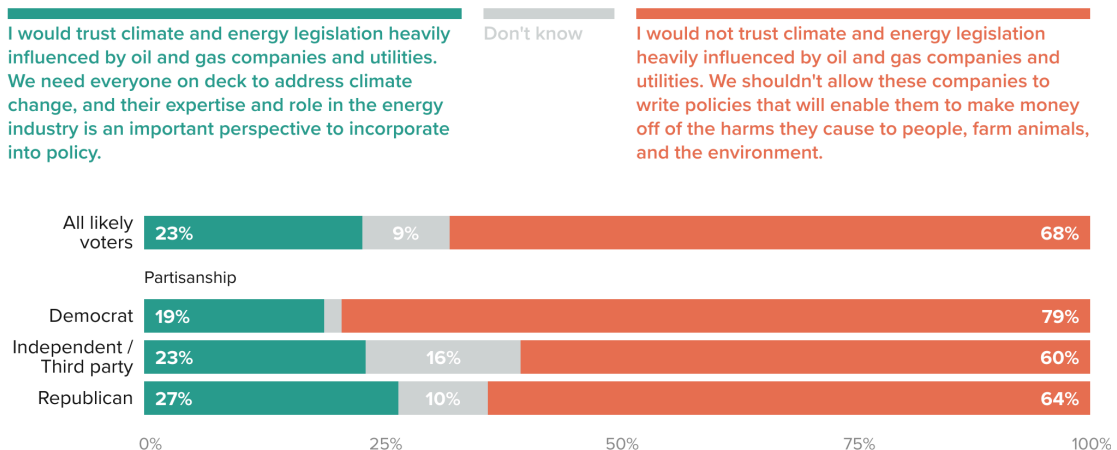
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Lastly, a strong majority of voters agree (68%) with a statement saying that they would not trust climate and energy legislation heavily influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities, compared with less than a quarter (23%) who agree a statement saying that they would trust legislation influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities.

Michigan Voters Across Partisanship Say They Would Not Trust Climate Legislation Influenced by Fossil Fuel Companies or Utilities

Which of these statements best describes your view, even if neither is exactly right?



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Conclusion

There is a strong appetite for climate legislation among Michigan voters. However, the findings from this survey reveal that this support is conditional on these prospective climate policies actually delivering meaningful environmental and health benefits **without unduly** benefiting polluters.

Survey Methodology

From April 16 to 23, 2024, Data for Progress and Farm Forward conducted a [survey](#) of 834 likely voters in Michigan using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.