



ROB STAFSHOLT

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DATE: June 4, 2025
RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 219
TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture & Revenue
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt

Thank you, Chairman Testin and committee members, for allowing me to come in and testify on Senate Bill 219. This bill is vital to making sure that Wisconsin's agricultural heritage remains central to our state's future as well as to the safeguarding of our national security.

The Wisconsin Farmland Protection Act would make several necessary reforms to the legality of future purchases of our state's agricultural land by foreign individuals or entities – including governments. I want to note right away that all limitations in this bill will apply only to future transactions and will not have effect retroactively beyond limitations that already exist in statute.

Central to this bill's impact would be significant limitations on the agricultural acreage that foreign persons or entities may purchase in the state of Wisconsin. Current law allows up to 640 acres, which is equivalent to one square-mile, while this bill would bring that number down to 50 acres. Ensuring Wisconsin – and at the very least, American – ownership of the prime food-producing acres of our state is essential to our economy and to the supply chain that puts food on kitchen tables across our country.

The bill would also promote United States national security by prohibiting any foreign person, entity, or government, from owning land within 10 miles of a military installation. Further, any foreign adversary deemed as such by the U.S. Department of Commerce will be completely barred from acquiring or owning any real property in the state of Wisconsin. By protecting our military bases and keeping foes like China, Iran, and Venezuela from owning our land – our state will be doing its part to protect America's interests and security.

The US Department of Agriculture estimated in 2020 that 37.6 million acres of agricultural land in America was foreign owned, and by the end of 2023, that number had risen to 45.9 million. This was highlighted by Wisconsin's own Brian Reisinger, who wrote the new book *Land Rich, Cash Poor*, he expressed great concern over the fact that foreign-owned farmland in America increased by 15% over a two-year period – with much of that increase being driven by sales to Chinese entities. Wisconsin's agricultural industry contributes \$116.3 billion annually to our state's economy – the time is now to secure this vital sector of our economy before it's too late.

I thank you for taking the time to consider this bill. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.



CLINT P. MOSES

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June 4th, 2025

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue Testimony on Senate Bill 219

Thank you Chair Testin and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue for holding this hearing on Senate Bill (SB) 219, relating to limitations on ownership of real property in Wisconsin by foreign persons.

In recent years, foreign adversaries have begun purchasing land near U.S. military bases in various states. These purchases raise serious national security and agricultural concerns. Allowing foreign companies with governmental ties, or the foreign governments themselves to own land near sensitive military facilities presents risks that cannot be ignored. Foreign buyers are increasingly purchasing large tracts of farmland, often without living in the state or farming the land themselves. In Wisconsin, over 500,000 acres are owned by foreign adversaries. This not only inflates land prices, making it harder for local farmers to compete, but also raises long-term questions about who controls our food supply.

SB 219 addresses these concerns by placing common sense limits on foreign ownership. First, the bill reduces the maximum amount of farmland a foreign entity may own from 640 acres to 50 acres. Secondly, it restricts foreign ownership of any land within 10 miles of a military installations. Finally, it prohibits foreign adversaries from acquiring interests in any real property in Wisconsin and raises the limit on a company's foreign ownership percentage to be applicable to these restrictions from 20% to 25%. Foreign adversaries are decided by US Department of Commerce under 15 CFR 791.4. The current countries on the list are China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela. These measures in SB 219 protect Wisconsin's agricultural resources and ensures that our military operations are not exposed to unnecessary risks.

There is similar legislation in committee that looks to protect farmland from foreign adversaries. I want to share with you a few key components that are different from that bill to SB 219. My bill reduces the agriculture land limit to 50 acres while the other bill retains the 640-acre limit. The other bill does not include limiting foreign entities from owning land near military installations. In SB 219, the divestiture period is reduced from four years to three years. The other bill keeps the current 4 years divestiture period. In SB 219, the State Attorney General enforces the bill while the other bill does not explicitly state who enforces foreign entities owning land in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin is not alone in facing these issues. More than 20 states have introduced similar legislation. Many Midwest states have implemented total bans on foreign ownership of agricultural land, with limited exceptions. SB 219 would bring Wisconsin in line with other states taking action to protect their rural communities.

Wisconsin's agriculture industry contributes \$116.3 billion annually to our state's economy. Farmers work the land, support their local communities, and help feed our state and world. They deserve to compete on a level playing field when purchasing farmland and know that the land around them is securely owned by local neighbors. This bill ensures our farmers can continue to farm, and know that our state is safe from foreign influence.

I ask you to support Senate Bill 219 and thank you once again for your time to consider this piece of legislation.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE VINCENT MIRESE

71st Assembly District ♥ The Heart of Wisconsin

Date: June 4th, 2025

RE: **Testimony on Senate Bill 219**

To: The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue

From: Representative Vincent Miresse

Chairman Testin and members of the Committee on Agriculture and Revenue.

Thank you for accepting my testimony on Senate Bill 219 related to limitations on ownership of real property in this state by foreign persons.

Senate Bill 219 would place a limit on ownership of real property in Wisconsin by foreign persons, specifically foreign adversaries. This seems appropriate on its face value, but upon deeper inspection, it jeopardizes potential future investment in industry and manufacturing in our state.

While keeping our safety and national security top of mind, we must be thorough in our evaluation of which industries are critical to security and which need an infusion of capital to reinvest in our communities. In central Wisconsin, specifically in Biron, WI, our Nine Dragons mill makes cardboard from recycled paper, providing hundreds of middle-class, family-sustaining jobs to the area. Nine Dragons is hardly a national security risk. Potential investment in and development of the former Verso Paper Mill site in Wisconsin Rapids could be jeopardized if this bill were to pass in its current form. This would jeopardize hundreds, perhaps thousands, of needed jobs for a central Wisconsin community that was hit hard when Verso closed its doors.

Currently, Wisconsin is attractive to investment because we have positioned ourselves as a welcoming state that is easy to work with. Senate Bill 219 sends the wrong message to businesses and investors who see the opportunity to earn money and create jobs. Should Senate Bill 219 be passed into law, potential foreign investors, even in industries not critical to national security, will have to look elsewhere in the United States, denying our state jobs and capital we would surely benefit from.

While I agree we must prioritize our national security, I believe we can accomplish these goals while not hamstringing Wisconsin with a one-size-fits-all approach. We must be more strategic and thoughtful targeting, specific industries that are vital to national interests and security. For example, we could limit involvement, investment, and ownership in our fertilizer industry by foreign stakeholders. We should assert control where our efforts are needed most, not by attacking foreign investment from companies who make cardboard boxes.

I hope to support an amended version of this bill in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

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TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue
FROM: Nathan Butzlaff, Government Relations Representative, EDP Renewables
DATE: June 4, 2025
RE: Senate Bill 219 (Relating to: limitations on ownership of real property in this state by foreign persons)

EDP Renewables North America (EDPR NA) is a wholly owned subsidiary of EDP Renovaveis S.A., the world's fourth-largest producer of wind and solar energy across 28 markets in Europe, North America, South America, and Asia. EDPR NA has developed 61 wind farms and 26 solar parks across North America, including the 98-megawatt Quilt Block Wind Farm in Lafayette County, Wisconsin. Since launching commercial operations in 2017, Quilt Block Wind Farm has paid over \$6.3 million to local landowners and over \$1.3 million to local governments in tax revenues and permitting fees. The project represents a \$166.6 million capital investment in Seymour Township and generates electricity equal to the consumption of over 36,000 Wisconsin homes.

On behalf of EDPR NA, I respectfully request an amendment to Senate Bill 219 to help ensure that Wisconsin communities can continue to benefit from capital investment projects that build long-term partnerships and provide economic development opportunities in Wisconsin communities. In particular, we request the following changes:

1. Increasing the threshold for corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships, or associations to more than 50 percent (instead of more than 25 percent, as in the bill) of their stock, securities, or other indicia of ownership held or owned, directly or indirectly, by foreign individuals, foreign corporations, or foreign governments.
 - a. The increase to 50 percent is similar to the threshold that is included in Senate Substitute Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 7, which is used in the definition of "foreign principal" on page 3, lines 10-12.
 - b. Language exempting lease agreements, lease option agreements or easement agreements from the acreage limit under 710.02(1) in current statute [renumbered as 710.02(1r) under the bill]. *The bill analysis states, "This bill modifies current law that limits certain foreign persons from acquiring, owning, or holding large amounts of agricultural and forestry land in this state."* We would like to clarify that leases do not constitute owning or holding property as drafted in the bill.
 1. Specifically, we request adding the following language to the bill:
"SECTION 9. 710.02 (2) (d) is amended to read:
710.02 (2) (d) A lease agreement, lease option agreement or easement agreement."

When developing renewable energy projects, EDPR NA (and many other utility-scale developers) negotiate with local landowners to lease the ground on which the project infrastructure is

built. Leases, rather than ownership, ensure that local landowners stand to benefit most directly from these projects while continuing to own the land that, in many instances, has been passed down through their families for generations and ensures that the land can continue to remain under family ownership.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me (nathan@hovenconsulting.com) or Tim Hoven (tim@hovenconsulting.com). Thank you for your consideration.



June 4, 2025

**To: Senate Committee Chairman Patrick Testin
Honorable Members of the Wisconsin State Senate Committee on
Agriculture and Revenue**

From: Ken Liu, CEO - ND Paper

**Re: Senate Bill 219: Limitations on Ownership of Real Property in this State by
Foreign Adversaries**

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue. My name is Ken Liu, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for ND Paper. I was born and raised in California and am a proud United States citizen. My parents, Yan Cheung and Ming Chung Liu, lived in the United States for over 20 years and have built a world class recycling company based in California named ACN, and today, our 3 founders have built the world's largest paper company by tonnage with operations in the United States, China, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

While we appreciate the general intent of Senate Bill 219, our company has concerns with regard to the potentially adverse effects that the proposal, as currently drafted, would have upon our company's current and future operations.

As you know, paper mills are key economic drivers in the communities in which they operate. Mills have also closed in the past decade, as the predominate grade of printing and writing no longer has a competitive future in terms of demand. In 2018, we acquired a struggling printing and writing mill, and invested over \$300 million in the facility to transform it into a leading, high performance packaging paper mill. Without said investments, the reality is the Biron mill, just like its former sister mill in Wisconsin Rapids, would have faced closure and an unfortunate end to a storied history.

Our Biron Division alone operates 2 recycled packaging paper machines (B25 and B26) and employs 250 full-time employees. Our mill has a significant community presence in the Village of Biron and the surrounding towns and cities in and around Wood County and Central Wisconsin.



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Additionally, in 2019, we purchased an idled warehouse and invested over \$50 million dollars to create ND Packaging, a division that is located in Sturtevant, Wisconsin and is proud to operate as a local employer in Racine County, employing 100 men and women. This facility is a shining model for the future of corrugated packaging, with automated controls and high quality box production, right here in the State of Wisconsin.

Still further we own a trucking company, Dragon Xpress, serving the southern Wisconsin corridor from Minneapolis to Chicago and employing 25 men and women.

ND Paper takes great pride in the reputation it has earned throughout Wisconsin as a respected community partner. In addition, our commitment to environmental stewardship is a mission that our employees take very seriously because they themselves work, live and raise their families in the areas in and around Biron and Sturtevant and want their communities to prosper and grow.

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, we believe that the legislation before you could potentially have serious negative consequences for our Wisconsin operations.

Specifically, we have concerns regarding the following "Ownership of Real Property" language which reads:

The bill prohibits a foreign adversary from acquiring, owning, or holding any interest in real property in this state. Under the bill, "foreign adversary" means a person determined by the U.S. Department of Commerce to be a foreign adversary of the United States. Those countries currently include China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela under the regime of Nicolás Maduro. The bill provides that any interest acquired, owned, or held by a foreign adversary in violation of the bill is forfeited to the state and that the attorney general is responsible for enforcement.

If this language is determined to be retroactive and affect our current operating structure, the impact to ND Paper would not only disrupt our current papermaking operations, but essentially eliminate our ability to do business in this state. Jobs would be lost as well as any future job creation opportunities. This would also bar any future expansions within our current manufacturing footprint as well as establish a ban on any future investment by ND Paper in this state.



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Given the fact that Wisconsin is the #1 paper producer in the entire nation and ND Paper is leading the way in helping to maintain that coveted status as well as creating economic growth opportunities for Wisconsin communities, we urge you to consider the consequences of the current language in this bill with respect to our company.

ND Paper understands and appreciates the sensitivity of the bills that are proposed, but ask for your consideration to exclude established, private businesses such as mine that have no state ownership.

We urge you to consider reasonable changes to this legislation which would achieve the goal of protecting national security interests while still allowing for ND Paper to continue its important manufacturing mission in our great state as well as allowing for future growth and job creation opportunities.

We look forward to working with the author of SB 219 and this esteemed committee in order to address the concerns we have raised. Please feel free to contact me at any time via email at ken.liu@us.ndpaper.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns and the opportunity to testify today.



June 4, 2025

**To: Senate Committee Chairman Patrick Testin
Honorable Members of the Wisconsin State Senate Committee on
Agriculture and Revenue**

From: Lee Graf Maintenance Manager Biron Division - ND Paper

**Re: Senate Bill 219: Limitations on Ownership of Real Property in this State by
Foreign Adversaries**

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue. My name is Lee Graf, and I am the Maintenance Manager at the Biron Mill. My daily interactions are with the USW, IAM, UAJ, OPIU, IBEW unions. I lead a dedicated team with strong pay, a proud people, and unmatched dedication to complete work and make this mill safe and profitable for the long term. I am also a former Union VP and President for a total of 9 years. Worker at ND Biron for over 5 years.

I am a local coach in football and basketball, I have been a local Alderman and helped the community as a leader to secure \$10.5 million for athletic improvement. I plan to stay in this area and have roots here.

I plan to continue to grow with ND Paper and I do not want our opportunity for growth to be limited. There is no difference in foreign or US ownership. It is the people that make the company, make the products, make the village.

While we appreciate the general intent of Senate Bill 219, our company has concerns regarding the potentially adverse effects that the proposal, as currently drafted, would have upon our company's current and future operations.

Our Biron Division alone operates 2 recycled packaging paper machines (B25 and B26) and employs 250 full-time employees. Our mill has a significant community presence in the Village of Biron and the surrounding towns and cities in and around Wood County and Central Wisconsin.

ND Paper understands and appreciates the sensitivity of the bills that are proposed, but ask for your consideration to exclude established, private businesses such as mine that have no state ownership.



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We urge you to consider reasonable changes to this legislation which would achieve the goal of protecting national security interests while still allowing for ND Paper to continue its important manufacturing mission in our great state as well as allowing for future growth and job creation opportunities.

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Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns and the opportunity to testify today.



June 4, 2025

**To: Senate Committee Chairman Patrick Testin
Honorable Members of the Wisconsin State Senate Committee on
Agriculture and Revenue**

From: Steve Demyon VP& General Manager Biron Division - ND Paper

**Re: Senate Bill 219: Limitations on Ownership of Real Property in this State by
Foreign Adversaries**

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue. My name is Steve Demyon, and I am the VP and GM at the Biron Mill. I am from West Virginia transplanted to Wisconsin just 2 years ago, I have been in the paper industry for over 30 years. If you trust LinkedIn, reported that 117 paper mills have closed in the past 20 years, and over 220,000 Union Jobs lost to paper mill closures. My mill in West Virginia was idled with over 100 staffers, in 2023.

I am here in Wisconsin to bring efficiency so that does not happen again. Let's not put more hurdles in place to stall growth. Because we all know you grow, or you die, we are growing.

Community efforts include 7 College interns, (2) \$2K scholarships given away each year supporting a 4-year degree. The Wisconsin Economic Group visited our Corporate Office in Dongguan, China, this year. ND Biron is the only group in Wisconsin that has its own representative with Focus on Energy because we are so involved in saving energy and saving state resources. Not to mention contributions to local colleges, fire department, and high school support. 1896 this site produced its first paper, and ever since this mill been a part of this community and source of family growth and prosperity, if this bill was in place in 2018 would it still be alive?

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We look forward to working with the author of SB 219 and this esteemed committee in order to address the concerns we have raised. Please feel free to contact me at any time via email at steven.demyon@us.ndpaper.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns and the opportunity to testify today.