

THIS IS HAPPENING EVERYWHERE.

Jeff Melin's Farm Is Not an Isolated Case.

It Is Part of a National Pattern of Eminent Domain Abuse
That Reaches from Iowa to Georgia to Texas to New York —
And Is Concentrated, With Striking Frequency, on Working Farms.

By Vincent Cordova | Cordova for President 2028 | May 2026

Jeff Melin is 57 years old. He has worked the same 450 acres in Spalding County, Georgia, his entire life. His father farmed it before him. Century-old pecan trees stood on that land — trees his family planted and tended across three generations. He ran cattle on it. He raised food on it. He built a life on it.

Now the county is taking half of it. Not because of a highway. Not because of a hospital. Not because of any genuine public necessity.

They are taking it to build a corporate jet airport.

A 6,000-foot runway. One hundred and twenty-four hangars. Designed not for commercial passengers, not for emergency services, not for the public — but for private aircraft owned by wealthy individuals and corporations. The county paid Melin a fraction of what comparable land sold for nearby. They gave him 90 days to move his herd and clear out 75 years of his family's equipment. They cut down the pecan grove before the legal process was even finished.

When I first wrote about Jeff Melin, I called it a local injustice with national implications. I want to go further than that now.

Since that piece was published, my campaign has been tracking eminent domain actions across the country. We have been looking at the cases, the land involved, and what was being produced on it before the government moved in. What we found is not a coincidence. In case after case — from Iowa to Louisiana to Georgia to New York — the land being seized is working farmland. Not vacant lots. Not abandoned properties. Active, food-producing American farms.

Pay attention to what follows. Pay attention to what was growing on the land before they took it.

The Cases — And What Was on the Land

We investigated the land use status of every major active eminent domain case in the country. Here is what we found, case by case:

CARBON CAPTURE PIPELINES: The Hottest Front

The single most active theater of eminent domain abuse in America right now is carbon capture pipelines — projects capturing CO₂ from ethanol plants and injecting it underground, backed by billions in federal tax credits. They are running directly through the agricultural heartland of the Midwest and the farming communities of the Gulf Coast.

- **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Active corn, soybean, and grain farmland

IOWA | Summit Carbon Solutions — The Midwest Carbon Express

Summit Carbon Solutions has been attempting to build a 688-mile CO₂ pipeline across Iowa connecting ethanol plants to underground storage. The company was granted eminent domain authority by the Iowa Utilities Commission — the power to force unwilling landowners to accept easements. The land in the pipeline's path is working Iowa farmland. The Iowa Utilities Commission's own order noted documented concerns about crop yield damage and drainage tile destruction — the language of active farming, not vacant land. Two-thirds of the affected Iowa landowners are 65 years old or older, meaning most have farmed this land for decades. Iowa lawmakers passed a bill restricting eminent domain for the project; Governor Kim Reynolds vetoed it. The 2026 legislative session ended with no ban enacted. Summit has since rerouted the pipeline to bypass 400 landowners — not because of principle, but because of legal and regulatory pressure. The fight has now moved to Nebraska and Wyoming, where the same farmland is at stake.

- **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Active corn, soybean, and grain farmland

SOUTH DAKOTA | The State That Fought Back

South Dakota landowners — corn and soybean farmers in the same agricultural corridor as Iowa — organized a property rights revolt that culminated in a 2025 state law banning the use of eminent domain for CO₂ pipelines entirely. The law directly blocked Summit's planned route through active agricultural land. In North Dakota, two state judges have separately ruled that Summit's underground storage permits are unconstitutional. South Dakota showed what is possible when a state government chooses its farmers over a corporation. It should not require a state-by-state fight to establish a principle that should be settled federal law.

- **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Active agricultural land including sugarcane farms and rural crop land

LOUISIANA | The Bill That Should Have Passed

Louisiana leads the nation in proposed carbon capture projects — at least 65 planned statewide, with southwest Louisiana as ground zero. One documented example: ExxonMobil sought a test well drilled on privately owned farmland currently used for sugarcane production in Iberville Parish. Governor Landry declared a moratorium on

new applications after a growing chorus of protest from, in his own words, 'local landowners and farmers.' The Louisiana Landowners Protection Act, House Bill 7, came to a House committee hearing in March 2026. The room was packed with rural farmers who drove to Baton Rouge to testify. One man told the committee that his neighbor — a man with stage four cancer — had been told by a company representative: accept our offer, or we take the land by eminent domain. The bill failed 12 to 7. Industry lobbyists prevailed. The farmers drove home.

"ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT" PROJECTS: The Post-Kelo Playbook

The second major category uses the legal theory exploited since the Supreme Court's 2005 Kelo decision: that "economic development" constitutes a public use sufficient to justify taking private property. The land involved is not abstract. It is named, farmed, and in families.

- **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Active multi-generational Black family farm — cotton, corn, timber, and crops

GEORGIA | Sandersville Railroad — The Smith Family Farm, Sparta

This case demands to be told in full. The Smith family's land in Hancock County, Georgia, has been farmed since the 1920s, when James Smith — two generations removed from slavery — purchased 600 acres by trading his share of a cotton harvest earned through sharecropping. Blaine Smith, who now owns the property with his wife Diane, is among the less than 2 percent of Black farmers in the United States. 'My father farmed this land; my grandfather farmed it during most of his life,' Blaine Smith said. 'He raised cotton, corn, peas, all kinds of vegetables. It's still in the Smith family. Not one piece of it had gotten away.' Until now. The Sandersville Railroad Company — owned by a prominent local family — received eminent domain authority from the Georgia Public Service Commission to seize a 200-foot strip running through three of the Smiths' parcels for a 4.5-mile rail spur serving a rock quarry. The Smiths raise crops and timber on the land. The proposed spur cuts two of their parcels in half. The Georgia Court of Appeals upheld the taking in April 2026. The Smiths are preparing to appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court. 'This is about more than just my family's land,' Blaine Smith said. 'It's about protecting all Georgia property owners from this type of abuse.'

- **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: NO** | Historic Black residential community — not a farm, but generational land nonetheless

FREEMPORT, TEXAS | Port Freeport and the East End — A Neighborhood Erased

The East End of Freeport, Texas, was established in 1930 as a segregated neighborhood — the area where Black residents were required to live under the city's

redlining laws. Families built lives there over generations: homes, churches, a barbershop, a barbecue place, community. This was not a farm. But it was generational land held for a century by a community that had no other choice about where to build. Port Freeport spent more than two decades acquiring the East End for expansion. It bulldozed the neighborhood. In September 2025, the Texas 14th Court of Appeals ruled the Port had acted unconstitutionally — it 'never could identify a specific public use' and 'admitted that it did not have any specific plans for what will be developed.' The court called it a 'take now, plan later approach that the Constitution does not condone.' The ruling was a legal victory. The neighborhood is gone. One important fact for the record: according to multiple analyses, Black Americans make up more than half of all Americans who have lost property through eminent domain since World War II, despite representing at most 14 percent of the population. The Freeport case and the Smith family case in Georgia are not accidents of geography.

● **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: PARTIAL** | Original cattle farm taken by eminent domain — twice, 60 years apart

NEW YORK | Azalia King — A Cattle Farmer Displaced Twice

The story of Azalia King is more than a 91-year-old woman threatened with eviction for a semiconductor plant. It is the story of a cattle farmer who has now been displaced by eminent domain twice in her lifetime. Around 1965, Onondaga County used the threat of eminent domain to force King and her husband Glenn off their farm to make way for a power station. That is how they came to live on their second property on Caughdenoy Road — surrounded, as one report noted, by sprawling cattle pastures. There, they ran a beef cattle farm and raised six children. In 2005, they sold their 47-acre cattle farm property to the county under the condition they could live on 3.61 acres for the rest of their lives. Glenn died in 2015. In 2025, the county threatened eminent domain to remove Azalia — at 91 years old — for Micron's \$100 billion semiconductor campus. A negotiated resolution was eventually reached. But the truth of what happened is this: a cattle farmer was driven off one farm by eminent domain in 1965, moved to land that was also a cattle farm, and was then threatened with eminent domain again six decades later. The land beneath Micron's construction site was active agricultural land. It did not start as an industrial park.

AIRPORTS: Where We Started — And Where It Continues

● **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Active cattle farm — 450 acres, three generations, 95 head of cattle

GEORGIA | Jeff Melin — Spalding County Airport

As documented at length in our earlier reporting: 225 acres of a multi-generational cattle farm. 124 corporate jet hangars. 90 days to clear out 75 years of farm

equipment and relocate 95 head of cattle. Century-old pecan trees destroyed before the legal process was finished. Compensation at a fraction of true market value. This is where we began. It is not where the story ends.

• **FOOD-PRODUCING LAND: YES** | Rural Hill Country ranch and agricultural land

TEXAS | Kerrville / Kerr County Airport

Airport-related eminent domain battles are not limited to Georgia. In Kerrville, Texas, landowners in the rural Hill Country are fighting a taking connected to runway protection and expansion at Kerrville-Kerr County Airport. The Hill Country is ranch and agricultural land. The details differ from Melin's case. The structure does not.

The Scorecard: What Was on the Land

Of the seven major active eminent domain cases we tracked:

- Five involve active, confirmed food-producing agricultural land: Iowa farmland, South Dakota farmland, Louisiana sugarcane and crop land, the Smith family farm in Georgia (cotton, corn, timber), and Jeff Melin's cattle farm in Georgia.
- One — Azalia King in New York — involves a cattle farm that was taken by eminent domain once before, decades ago, with the displaced family then building a new cattle operation on land that is now also being taken.
- One — Freeport, Texas — was a residential community, not a farm. It was the historic Black East End neighborhood, and its seizure is a serious injustice of a different but related kind.

Five of seven confirmed food-producing farms. Six of seven involving generational land held for decades or over a century. Five of seven concentrated in agricultural corridors — the Midwest ethanol belt, the Gulf Coast rural South, and the rural Southeast.

We are not drawing a conclusion about why. We are reporting what is there. And what is there is this: in case after case, when the government deploys eminent domain for corporate projects backed by federal dollars, it is active farmland that disappears.

Pay Attention to the Map

Look at where these cases are concentrated:

- Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming — the agricultural Midwest, the corn and ethanol belt, the carbon capture pipeline corridor.
- Louisiana — the Gulf Coast, ground zero for CO₂ storage, 65 projects planned, farmland and rural communities in the crosshairs.
- Georgia — the rural Southeast, corporate aviation and private railroads expanding into Black family farms and cattle operations.
- Texas — the Gulf Coast port expansion corridor and rural Hill Country airport expansion.
- New York — upstate agricultural and ranch land cleared for a semiconductor megaproject.

The current front lines are carbon pipelines and economic development projects. But airports, ports, rail spurs, and semiconductor campuses are part of the same system — the same legal theory, the same power dynamic, and the same outcome for the families who happen to own land that someone more powerful wants.

The 2005 Kelo decision opened this door. Congress padlocked it in 2006 with a law that was more symbol than structure. Twenty years later, the door is wide open — and every corporate interest in America knows it. So does every federal agency that writes the checks that make these projects possible.

What Every One of These Cases Has in Common

The projects are different. The states are different. The companies and agencies are different. But strip away the details and every one of these cases rests on the same three elements:

- A private commercial interest that wants land it does not own.
- A legal mechanism — eminent domain — that allows the government to force the transfer.
- A family that had no meaningful power to stop it.

In Iowa and Louisiana, it is carbon capture companies granted eminent domain authority to cross active farmland, backed by federal tax credits worth up to \$85 per metric ton of sequestered carbon — corporate welfare dressed as climate policy, paid for by American taxpayers, enforced against American farmers.

In Sparta, Georgia, it is a private railroad company seizing strips of a Black family's farm — land purchased through sharecropping, held for over a century — to haul rocks from a quarry owned by a publicly traded German corporation.

In Spalding County, Georgia, it is a county government seizing a three-generation cattle farm for corporate jet hangars and paying the farmer a fraction of what the land is worth.

In upstate New York, it is a county development agency threatening a 91-year-old cattle farmer with eminent domain — for the second time in her life — to clear land for a \$100 billion semiconductor campus.

In every case: someone with political connections and legal resources wanted something. The government provided the mechanism. Working families and working farms paid the price.

South Dakota Showed the Way. The Federal Government Must Follow.

South Dakota passed a law banning eminent domain for CO₂ pipelines. Iowa's governor vetoed the same protection her own Senate passed. Louisiana's committee killed it 12 to 7. Texas courts ruled in favor of the East End families — after the neighborhood was already bulldozed. Georgia's Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the railroad — and the Smith family is now preparing a last appeal to the state Supreme Court.

This is what happens when you fight eminent domain abuse state by state, case by case, appeal by appeal: you win some. You lose some. The land is gone either way.

The solution is not another state law. The solution is a federal framework that applies uniformly — that requires genuine public necessity before eminent domain can be used to destroy active farmland or displace generational communities, mandates full independent market-rate compensation, and strips federal funding from any project that does not meet that standard.

If your carbon pipeline depends on federal tax credits, it will meet federal standards. If your airport depends on FAA funding, it will meet federal standards. If your semiconductor campus depends on federal economic development grants, it will meet federal standards. Including the standard that says you cannot force a farmer off the land that feeds this country without genuine public necessity and full and honest compensation.

What I Will Do As President

On day one of my administration, I will direct the Federal Aviation Administration to freeze all federal approvals and Airport Improvement Program grants for the Spalding County Airport project pending a full review of public benefit justification, agricultural impact, and the adequacy of compensation paid to Jeff Melin.

I will direct the Department of Justice to open an investigation into whether Melin received constitutionally required just compensation.

And I will direct every federal agency disbursing funds to carbon capture projects — including the IRS credits that make the Summit Carbon pipeline financially viable — to make those funds conditional on full compliance with the public necessity and just compensation standards that the Constitution has always required and that the federal government has for too long looked away from.

The Cordova Administration will pursue the American Agricultural Sovereignty Act, which will:

- Establish that eminent domain cannot be used to permanently destroy active food-producing land for any purpose that primarily serves private commercial interests.
- Require independent federal appraisals at true market value before any taking of agricultural land is finalized.
- Create a federal right of action for landowners who receive below-market compensation.
- Strip federal funding from any project that uses eminent domain against agricultural land without meeting the public necessity standard and paying genuine just compensation.
- Establish a 180-day mandatory notice period before any physical alteration of taken agricultural property — so no more pecan groves cut down while appeals are still pending.
- Prohibit private equity and foreign state-linked entities from acquiring food-producing American farmland, and establish a unified Top Tier Organic Production and Care standard for all agricultural operations on American soil.

A Final Word

The Iowa farmer watching his drainage tiles get torn up for a carbon pipeline. The Louisiana family who drove to Baton Rouge and watched the committee kill the bill that would have protected them. Blaine and Diane Smith, whose ancestors sharecropped the land they farm today and who are now watching a Georgia court hand it to a private railroad. Azalia King — cattle farmer, twice displaced, 91 years old — who has spent her entire life watching the government take land she worked and loved. Jeff Melin, standing in what used to be his pecan grove.

These are not separate stories. They are the same story, told in different places, by different families, about the same food-producing land and the same failure of the same system.

We checked. The land was working. The farms were producing. The food was real.

I am asking you to stand with the people who grew it — and to hold accountable the system that is taking it from them.

If your farm or land is under threat, we want to hear from you: eminent-domain@vincentcordova.com