

Michigan Farmer's Stand for Faith Triumphs in Landmark Court Ruling

A federal district court's ruling on Monday delivered a resounding victory for a Michigan fruit farmer and his family, signaling the end of a six-year legal battle centered on their steadfast commitment to religious freedom.

The decision underscores the principle that no individual should be coerced into violating their religious beliefs to appease the government, a core tenet upon which America was founded.

Steve Tennes, owner of Country Mill Farms, found himself embroiled in a legal battle with the city of East Lansing after he expressed his Catholic beliefs about marriage on Facebook. As a devout Catholic, Tennes stood firm in following the teachings of his faith, which include his perspective on marriage. The city officials, in response, excluded him from the local farmers market.

On Monday, a U.S. District Court judge upheld Tennes' right to exercise his religious beliefs without government interference. The court deemed East Lansing's actions a violation of Tennes' First Amendment rights, recognizing that depriving an individual of their rights based on faith dissuades religious expression.

Located in Charlotte, Michigan, Country Mill Farms is a second-generation, 120-acre family farm owned by Steve and his wife, Bridget Tennes, both military veterans. The farm had been participating in the East Lansing Farmer's Market since 2010 until 2017 when the city implemented a policy that unfairly targeted them.

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The legal battle wasn't an easy journey for the Tennes family. Steve Tennes, reflecting on their decision to sue the city, highlighted the weight of the choice they faced seven years ago. As parents and veterans, they stood at a crossroads between maintaining their family's livelihood and upholding their religious convictions.

The court's ruling affirms the broader principle that government cannot arbitrarily penalize individuals due to their beliefs. This victory underscores the importance of living in accordance with one's faith, as highlighted in verses like Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men," and Matthew 22:21, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Kate Anderson, senior counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), which represented the Tennes family, emphasized that the court's decision is a triumph for all individuals seeking to live out their religious beliefs without fear of government retribution.

As Tennes looks forward to putting this legal battle behind him, his commitment to serving people of all backgrounds remains unwavering. This victory stands as a reminder that the foundational principle of religious freedom remains an essential cornerstone of American society, even in the face of modern challenges. {eo}

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