



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEKLY  
from  
**Americans for Freedom of Religion**

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**Court Finds Catholic Farm Family Was Wrongfully Denied Access to a Local Farmers Market Because of Their Deeply Held Religious Beliefs**

After both served in the military, Steve and Bridget Tennes moved back to the family farm where Steve was born, Country Hill Farms, in Charlotte, MI. The farming life particularly satisfied Steve and Bridget as it gave them the chance to work together and raise their children according to their Catholic beliefs. Their stated mission is to glorify God through their work and so were known to host events which resulted in contributions of thousands of apples to charitable organizations, providing quality, exceptional housing for their seasonal workers and also supporting an organization helping veterans to get a start in farming.

For years they had sold their products at a seasonal farmers market in East Lansing, MI, but were quickly banned from the market when city officials saw a Facebook posting where Steve and Bridget were asked about their beliefs about marriage. True to their Catholic faith, they answered that they believe marriage is between one man and one woman.

Officials from East Lansing saw the post, insisted that the Tennes were not adhering to the city's 's non-discrimination policy and immediately began working to keep the family from participating in the market. A city policy was written specifically targeting the Tennes and then eliminating them as market vendors.

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian legal-advocacy group, represented the Tennes and filed a complaint against the city of East Lansing in 2017. On Aug. 21, 2023, a district court ruled that the city could not deny access to the market to the Tennes based on their religious beliefs. The court said the city had placed "a burden" on the religious beliefs of Steve and Bridget by insisting they choose between their faith and their participation in a public benefit (the city's farmers market).

The ADF attorneys see the court's decision as an important win in the protection of religious freedom.

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*"It (religion) is an essential element of a constitutional state;  
it cannot be denied without at the same time encroaching on all fundamental rights and  
freedoms, since it is their synthesis and keystone." - Pope Benedict*