**Purdue Farm Policy Study Group Meeting Summary**

**July 7, 2026**

The following members were in attendance: Brent Bible, Steve Brown, Tim Brusnahan, Dave Clark, Kendell Culp, Zeb Davis, Tim Foltz, Ken Foster, Tim Galema, David Hardin, Scott Harper, Stephanie Harper, Terry Hayhurst, Stephanie Hopper, Kenzie House, David Howell, Levi Huffman, Joe Kelsay, Alan Kemper, Lisa Koester, Mark Legan, Marshall Martin, Tom McKinney, Doug Mills, Doug Morehouse, Shelby Myers, John Nidlinger, Olivia Reynolds, Ken Rulon, Mark Townsend, Don Villwock and Nicole Widmar

Excused*:* JoAnn Brouillette, Pete Clark, Otto Doering, Bill Gelfius, George Kakasuleff, Bryan Kirkpatrick, Randy Kron, Peyton Mohler, Danita Rodibaugh, Rick Ward and Mike Yoder

NOTE: Please visit Farm Policy Study Group to access presentation documents.

View the Agenda here: *July 2026 Farm Policy Study Group Agenda*

Agenda Items

*1. Student Attendees*

A group of interested Purdue graduate students and one new faculty member were able to join our discussions this year: Anna Aarstad, Josh Strine, Asa Dolbow Vann and Binayak Kunwar. We will continue to host student attendees, inviting undergraduate students to our December meetings and graduate students to our July meetings.

*2. Crop Updates and Go-Around*

Conditions varied considerably across the state. Northwest Indiana has been wet, resulting in delayed planting and some replanting. Drought pressures that had affected northeast Indiana earlier in the season have eased, and wheat conditions are reported as good. Central, eastern, and west-central Indiana are experiencing good conditions without excessive rain. Nursery crop sales are down, attributed to the high price of fuel and food.

*3. Impact and Policy:* ***Data Centers in Indiana and Surrounding States – PDF***

Ben Inskeep, Program Director at the Citizens Action Coalition (CAC), presented on the proliferation of large, energy-intensive data centers in Indiana and surrounding states and their implications for utility ratepayers, land, water, and agriculture. CAC is a nonprofit consumer and environmental advocacy organization, founded in 1974, that engages in research and public education, legislative advocacy, and regulatory advocacy and litigation on utility issues in Indiana.

**What Are Data Centers?**

Data centers are facilities that store, process, and manage data, transmitting it over fiber optic networks. A newer trend involves very large, energy-intensive data centers built to support generative artificial intelligence (AI) model training and inference.

**Regional Proliferation and Proposals in Indiana**

MISO expects dozens of large data centers to come online over the next five years, projecting 20 GW of new load by 2030, with Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois as the top Midwest markets. As of data collected through June 26, 2026, CAC has tracked 57 data center proposals in Indiana: 31 proposed, 7 under

construction or operating, and 18 withdrawn or defeated. Inskeep noted that big tech companies, developers, and co-location operators that lease space to other companies are all making proposals, and that Indiana's data center proliferation has been driven by state and local subsidies, existing electric, gas, fiber, and transportation infrastructure, lower land, labor, and tax costs, proximity to population centers, and relatively low natural disaster risk.

**Power Demand and Grid Impacts**

A single very large AI data center can use roughly ten times more power than a large industrial user – equivalent to the electricity use of about 1.6 million Hoosier households – and by approximately 2032, Big Tech data centers in Indiana could use twice as much electricity as all Hoosier households used as of 2025. The State Utility Forecasting Group's 2025 forecast projects a roughly 90% increase in statewide electricity consumption by 2035 under a data center scenario, with AI data center demand potentially exceeding all residential electricity use by 2029, though Inskeep noted high uncertainty in these projections. He also presented examples of data centers contributing to the extended operation of older, costlier coal plants (including NIPSCO's Schahfer, CenterPoint's Culley, Merom, Clifty Creek, and Cayuga) and described NIPSCO's plan to build 2,600 MW of new natural gas capacity at the Schahfer site in Wheatfield, IN to serve Amazon data centers, with emissions of up to 7 million tons of $CO_2$ per year.

**Implications for Land, Water, and Agriculture**

Individual data center sites can span several hundred to more than 1,000 acres (examples cited include Meta's 1,500-acre Lebanon site and Amazon's 2,000-acre New Carlisle site), raising concerns about loss of farmland and wetlands. On-site water consumption can reach as much as 8 million gallons per day, with additional off-site water use by the coal, gas, and nuclear plants that power them; Inskeep also cited examples of water pollution and large volumes of water pumped and dumped during construction. Backup diesel generators at data centers – sometimes numbering in the hundreds per site, with millions of gallons of diesel stored on site – create noise and NOx air pollution that contributes to ground-level ozone, which can harm plant growth and crop yields. Research on the heat island effect around data centers found air temperatures 100–500 meters downwind of a medium-sized data center up to 4°F hotter than surrounding areas (average 1.3–1.6°F), which Inskeep flagged as an additional risk to agricultural productivity given more frequent extreme heat days and drought.

**Subsidies, Transparency, and Policy Response**

Indiana offers a 100% sales tax exemption on data center equipment and electricity for up to 50 years, along with up to 10 years of local property tax abatement; Inskeep estimated that a single 1,000-MW data center's state sales tax exemption on its electric bill alone could total $1.7 billion over 50 years. He raised concerns about limited transparency – including use of NDAs, shell companies, and project code names – around energy and water consumption, subsidies received, and utility infrastructure spending. He also noted that data center growth has raised concerns about rising utility bills for other ratepayers, and that Indiana has seen a policy response including 20 counties passing moratoria or bans on data center development and 18 project proposals defeated locally.

*4. Small Modular Reactors:* ***Opportunities and Impacts for Indiana*** *-* ***PDF***

Dr. Indraneel Kumar, Director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD), and Dr. Kara Salazar, Assistant Program Leader for Community Development with Purdue Extension and Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, presented findings from a multi-chapter study on small modular reactor (SMR) technology and its impacts for Indiana, sponsored by the Indiana Office of Energy Development (IOED)

and conducted with Purdue's School of Nuclear Engineering, Purdue Polytechnic Institute, Argonne National Laboratory, Energy Systems Network, and Ivy Tech Community College.

**What Are SMRs?**

SMRs are compact nuclear reactors generally defined as having a generation capacity under 500 MWe, with many international bodies (e.g., the IAEA and World Nuclear Association) using a 300 MWe threshold. A 300 MWe SMR delivers 300 MW to the grid and can run nonstop for several months between maintenance. SMRs produce both thermal and electric energy (thermal output is roughly three times electric output), offer scalable, modular construction, and have a smaller land footprint and emergency planning zone than traditional nuclear plants.

**Indiana Policy and Legislative Landscape**

Indiana has enacted a series of policies supporting SMR development: Senate Bill 271 allows SMR development on retired coal sites; Senate Enrolled Acts 423, 424, and 425 establish an SMR pilot program, allow recovery of planning costs, and create energy production zones to facilitate transitions from coal to natural gas or SMR generation; House Enrolled Act 1007 allows 80% of certain costs to be recovered from large-load customers such as AI data centers; and House Enrolled Act 1222 limits state-level hearings to construction of nuclear facilities, with safety and siting evaluated by federal agencies. Executive Order 25-48 established the Nuclear Indiana Coalition to advance nuclear development in the state. Indiana Code §8-1-8.5-12.1(b) defines an SMR as an NRC-licensed nuclear facility with rated capacity no more than 470 MWe, operating alone or in combination with similar reactors.

**Economic Opportunities**

Overnight capital costs for SMRs range from roughly $4,500 to $5,350 per kW; a 300 MWe SMR was estimated at $1.4–$1.61 billion (Alonso et al. 2016), while a U.S.-based first-of-a-kind (FOAK) 300 MWe unit was estimated at $3.9 billion in the IOED SMR Final Report. Using a Lightcast Type II economic multiplier model, the presenters compared Indiana's 2024 employment, earnings, sales, and value-added multipliers for electric power generation across several energy sources (biomass, fossil fuel, hydro, solar, and wind); nuclear- and geothermal-specific multipliers were not available in the state-level model. Citing an Idaho National Laboratory study reported in the IOED report, they noted that a 300 MWe SMR can create roughly 100 direct jobs and 252 indirect and induced jobs during operations (a 3.52 jobs multiplier) and about $212 million per year in economic output, while a 500 MWe SMR could employ around 2,000 workers over a 4-year construction period. They noted that a nuclear plant generally creates about twice the jobs of a similarly sized fossil-fuel plant, with higher average wages, though actual impacts depend on reactor technology type and the strength of in-state supply chains.

**Coal-to-Nuclear Conversion**

The IOED study identified eight existing or former coal plant sites in Indiana – six currently operating and two recently retired – that are suitable for repurposing to SMR nuclear generation, citing advantages including shorter construction timelines and high capacity factors. Among all states, only Texas has more suitable coal-to-nuclear conversion sites than Indiana.

**Community Engagement Study (Chapter 7) – PDF**

Dr. Salazar presented findings from Chapter 7 of the study, a community engagement assessment intended to establish a baseline understanding of Indiana decision-makers' and residents' knowledge and perceptions of SMRs. The study combined four virtual focus group sessions with 18 decision-makers (planners and emergency managers, local economic developers, local elected officials, and utility

professionals) held in August 2024, with a statewide, quota-sampled electronic survey of Indiana adult residents fielded via Qualtrics between July 2 and July 20, 2024, yielding 1,012 complete responses from 86 of Indiana's 92 counties.

Among decision-makers, knowledge of nuclear and SMR technology varied by role – utility and economic development professionals reported more familiarity, while local elected officials, planners, and emergency managers more often reported knowledge gaps. Commonly cited concerns included emergency response and safety, especially in rural areas, and public acceptance shaped by historical nuclear disasters; cited advantages included efficiency, smaller land footprint relative to solar, reliability, and job creation. Universities, federal agencies and labs, the military, and nuclear industry experts were named as trusted information sources. Discussions of siting raised considerations such as proximity to transmission infrastructure, geology, and water access, along with tradeoffs between rural siting (generally seen as more accessible due to lower population density) and resource/support constraints in rural areas.

Among surveyed residents, 31% reported feeling not at all informed about nuclear energy and 40% only slightly informed, and 61% had not heard of SMRs specifically prior to the survey. On balance, 46% of respondents favored or strongly favored the use of SMR nuclear technology to produce electricity, versus 12% who opposed or strongly opposed it, with 42% neither opposing nor favoring it. The most frequently cited concerns were risk of accident (63%), production of radioactive water (56%), and onsite waste storage (41%); the most frequently cited arguments in favor were low cost of electricity (48%), energy independence (41%), and reduction of greenhouse gases (38%). Respondents generally preferred SMRs be sited in rural areas regardless of their own residential location. When asked to rate favorability of expanding various energy sources (0 = strongly oppose to 4 = strongly favor), respondents rated SMR nuclear power at 2.26, below utility-scale wind (2.68), utility-scale solar (2.64), and natural gas (2.51), but above conventional nuclear power (1.96) and coal mining (1.82).

The presenters' recommendations included: providing local decision-makers with education and technical assistance (in collaboration with industry, federal agencies, and university researchers) to support policy guidance on emergency response, risk assessment, and siting; communicating with residents through the sources they trust most – scientists, public regulatory authorities, and science journalists – using a mix of news articles, in-person Q&A opportunities, short videos, and education bulletins; and developing community engagement processes that build trust, set clear expectations about purpose and outcomes, and draw on partnerships with engagement experts.

*5. Future Meeting Planning and Feedback*

**Future meeting dates: December 8, 2026 and July 7, 2027**

*6. Adjournment at 3:30 pm*

Per the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm, followed at 4:00 pm by the Master Farmer Reception and Awards Program at the Beck Ag Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken Foster
Professor – Agricultural Economics
Director – Purdue Farm Policy Study Group