

Deere & Co. Reaches \$99 Million "Right to Repair" Settlement

Cracking the Black Box: Farmers Secure Historic Victory in Years-Long Repair Monopoly Suit

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Overview

For decades, farmers have operated under a fundamental understanding of property - if you buy it, you own it, and if it breaks, you fix it. However, the rapid digitization of agricultural machinery transformed tractors and combines into sophisticated rolling computers, effectively locking the "hood" with proprietary software. This technological shift sparked a national firestorm over the "Right to Repair," pitting the autonomy of equipment owners against the intellectual property and service monopolies of manufacturers.

On April 7, 2026, this tension reached a historic tipping point. In a landmark preliminary agreement filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Deere & Co. agreed to a \$99 million settlement to resolve a consolidated class-action antitrust suit.¹ The deal signifies more than just a financial payout; it represents a major structural shift in how agricultural giants must interface with independent mechanics and the farmers who rely on their equipment.

The Core of the Conflict

The lawsuit, which was consolidated into multidistrict litigation in 2022, accused John Deere of deliberately withholding diagnostic software, specialized tools, and manuals from farmers and independent repair shops. This practice allegedly forced equipment owners to rely exclusively on Deere's authorized dealer network for even minor technical repairs.

The plaintiffs argued that this "software lock" allowed Deere and its dealers to charge "supracompetitive" prices, placing an undue financial burden on the American farming community while creating costly delays during critical harvest and planting windows.

Terms of the Settlement

Under the proposed agreement filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, the resolution includes both financial compensation and operational changes:

- **Settlement Fund:** Deere will deposit \$99 million into a fund to reimburse class members.
- **Eligibility:** The class includes anyone who paid Deere or its authorized dealers for repairs on "large agricultural equipment" (including tractors, combines, and harvesters) from January 10, 2018, through the date of the deal's preliminary approval.

¹ In re Deere & Company Repair Services Antitrust Litigation, No. 3:22-cv-50188, MDL No. 3030 (N.D. Ill. April 7, 2026).

- **Guaranteed Access:** Deere has pledged to provide farmers and independent shops with the digital tools required for maintenance and repair for at least the next 10 years.
- **No Admission of Guilt:** As is common in such settlements, Deere denies any wrongdoing and maintains that it has always been dedicated to supporting customer repair needs.

The Future

While this settlement marks the end of one major legal hurdle, John Deere's "Right to Repair" woes are far from over.

1. **FTC Litigation:** The company still faces a separate antitrust lawsuit from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), filed in January 2025.² That case alleges that Deere's repair practices were "unfair" and "deceptive," and it remains active in the same Illinois court.
2. **State Legislation:** Lawmakers in 16 states have introduced "Right to Repair" bills this year. Industry advocates suggest that these legislative efforts may eventually impose even stricter requirements than the current court settlement.
3. **Final Approval:** The \$99 million deal still requires a final sign-off from the district court judge.

Impact on the Industry

The settlement is seen as a pivotal moment for the agricultural sector. For years, the digitization of farm equipment has created a "black box" environment where farmers owned their tractors but not the software required to run them.

This agreement, alongside the launch of Deere's Operations Center PRO Service in 2025, suggests a permanent shift toward transparency. For farmers, it promises lower repair costs and the freedom to choose their own mechanics; for the tech industry, it sets a potent precedent for how "software-as-a-gatekeeper" business models will be treated in court.

Farmers looking to file a claim are encouraged to visit the official settlement website (currently under construction) at www.DeereRepairSettlement.com.

² Federal Trade Commission *et al.* v. Deere & Company, No. 3:25-cv-50017 (N.D. Ill., filed Jan. 15, 2025). The complaint alleges that Deere restricted access to "Service ADVISOR" (its proprietary diagnostic software), violating Section 5 of the FTC Act and Section 2 of the Sherman Act. The FTC argues that these restrictions create an illegal monopoly by preventing farmers and independent repair providers (IRPs) from performing critical repairs. The government is seeking a permanent injunction to force Deere to make its full-function diagnostic resources available to the public on the same terms provided to authorized dealers.

Conclusion

The \$99 million settlement marks a watershed moment in the intersection of antitrust law and digital property rights. While the financial compensation offers immediate relief to producers who faced years of "supracompetitive" repair costs, the ten-year commitment to providing diagnostic tools is the more profound victory for the "Right to Repair" movement. Yet, the legal landscape remains complex. With the FTC's separate enforcement action still pending and a wave of state-level legislation gaining momentum, the agricultural industry is witnessing a permanent dismantling of the "black box" service model. As the court moves toward final approval, this case serves as a definitive warning to all manufacturers: in the modern era, the sale of a machine must include the practical ability to maintain it. For farmers, the road to true equipment autonomy is

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