



Discussion Topic

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Alternative Energy: Can farmers keep it moving forward?

Since Governor Jennifer Granholm signed the state's first renewable portfolio standard (RPS) into law, interest in producing alternative electric power has been rising. Wind parks are being planned or completed, hydro-electric generation is being explored, solar power is an option and on-farm methane digesters are on the radar.

There remain many skeptics, however. Solar panels for homeowners remain out of many families' economic reach, and wind on a small scale is also financially impractical for many people. But, on the bigger scale, there likely will be many more so-called "wind farms" on the horizon as the state's utilities scramble to generate 10 percent of their required renewable power by 2015.

Farmers are in a great position to cash in on wind power, said Matt Kapp, land stewardship specialist with Michigan Farm Bureau. But, he said, be cautious and check out terms of the contract, remembering that all things are negotiable.

"Michigan Farm Bureau has a worksheet on the Web (created by Michigan State University) to help farmers work through the process," he said. Visit www.michfb.com. "Because local ordinances are so variable, farmers need to pay close attention to setback requirements and other planning and zoning regulations," Kapp said.

"Right now, very few municipalities have ordinances about wind energy, but that's understandable because Michigan is just getting started in alternative energy. That's why now is a good time for our members to contact their local governments and explain to them the role farmers can have in alternative energy. This can be beneficial to farmers, the local government and the entire community." What all this means to farmers, Kapp said, is opportunity.

"Now that we know that wind leases are okay if the farmland is under a P.A. 116 contract, the opportunities for wind-generated electricity are prime in farm country," he said. "Farmers have the land base for wind power, the animal manure for biomass and, in some cases, the water resources for generating hydro-power. Once again, the state and nation looks to farmers to provide what they need."

QUESTIONS

- 1. What are the limitations on alternative energy in your community? Should there be more or fewer restrictions?**
- 2. Discuss the benefits and/or disadvantages of establishing a statewide standard for alternative energy generation.**
- 3. How can your county Farm Bureau help educate members about wind energy contracts?**