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## **A Brisk Future for Community-Based Wind Energy Development**

By Dan Juhl & Harvey Wasserman

By now it's become obvious that wind power has a huge economic future in this country and worldwide. Fossil fuel prices are soaring. The impacts of global warming are becoming clearer every day. Nuclear power is being slated for revival, but cannot compete in either cost or environmental impact or vulnerability to terrorism.

In fact, wind power is now the cheapest, cleanest, safest and most reliable form of new electrical generation. There's no clearer proof than its escalation to a multi-billion-dollar global industry, with substantial growth rates, high profit margins and increasing corporate involvement.

And with all that must come a crucial question: who will profit from this booming new industry? The answer in Minnesota must be: farmers and the community as a whole.

That we all benefit from the environmental and national security impacts of wind power is patently obvious. But where does the money go? Of all the states in the Union,

Minnesota currently stands alone with its powerful new Community-Based Energy Development legislation. This C-BED law has been passed into law by the legislature and signed by Governor Pawlenty. It has broad-based political support all across the partisan spectrum.

Why?

Because it makes it easier and cheaper to site, certify and build new wind projects. And because it keeps the profits from these projects inside the community.

In many cases, the windmills are owned by the farmers on whose land they are sited. This means that instead of just a minimal lease payment from a large corporate developer, farmers can in fact reap very substantial income from the "crop in the sky" harvested by the wind turbines on their land. Already more than \$90 million in such projects have been sited in southwestern Minnesota, more than anywhere else in the US. Already this income is having a substantial positive benefit for our community, in many cases saving family farms that might otherwise have gone under.

Likewise, farmers and local investors have banded together to form co-ops that will jointly own these projects, again keeping the profits within our rural towns and by-ways.

Already this trend has been noted in the major media of the "green" world, including Renewable Energy World Magazine of London, England, and the Solar Today Magazine of the American Solar Energy Association.

The C-BED legislation makes it easier for this trend to continue and expand. In particular it sets guidelines for power purchase agreements between farmer/community-

owned wind developments and the utilities that will buy the electricity generated by the windmills sited in our area.

In the past, negotiations between the farmer/community-based development groups have been complex, unwieldy and expensive. Often months or even years have been spent sorting through rates, quantity purchase guideline, payment schedules, and more. With attorney fees being charged up front, the process of finalizing such agreements was a major stumbling block for individual farmers or coops to get through to the decisive step of actually building their projects. The practical outcome was to make it difficult for anyone except major corporations or deep-pocketed investors to participate in this booming new technology.

But the C-BED law opens the field to those upon whom Minnesota's future really depends---its farmers, communities and ordinary local citizens with a little money to invest.

These farmer/community groups are also far more likely than the big, outside investors to have the installation and maintenance on these machines done locally. Thus we've seen our local farmer/community-owned projects spawning the birth and growth of local contractors whose business derives more and more from harvesting the wind. A case in point is the new blade manufacturing plant being built in Pipestone by Suzlon, the India-based turbine manufacturer whose stake in the American market has derived from farmer-owned projects right here in southwestern Minnesota. It's to the movement that has spawned the C-BED legislation that 175 folks in Pipestone will owe their jobs. And it's the continued spread of such projects that will guarantee those jobs continue.

The C-BED name is now attached to a non-profit organization ( C-BED.org ) aimed at promoting the reality of farmer/community-owned wind power. It is a concept that is proven every day in the thousands of wind-driven dollars that now stay in our community rather than flowing out to corporate coffers in far away cities.

As the power of this idea grows, it will spread to other states as well. But for Minnesota, the time is now to push ahead with farmer/community-owned C-BED-type wind farming. Our economic future may well depend on it.

*This monthly column is brought to you by the Southwest Minnesota Foundation as part of its initiative to advance renewable energy as an economic asset in southwest Minnesota by branding and promoting the region as The Renewable Energy Marketplace™. For more information on the Renewable Energy Marketplace™, log onto [www.renewableenergymarketplace.org](http://www.renewableenergymarketplace.org) and for more information on the Southwest Minnesota Foundation, log onto [www.swmnfoundation.org](http://www.swmnfoundation.org).*

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