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Overview

Wind energy currently accounts for around 2% of the country's renewable-source generating capacity. In 1995, total wind generating capacity was approximately 1800 MW, most of it (1600 MW) installed in California.

The American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) reports that, in 1992, approximately 1260 people were directly employed in the more than 50 firms that make up California's wind industry. When indirect employment (about 4350 jobs) is added, the industry supported around 5600 full-time jobs in the state that year. Nearly all wind industry jobs are related to operating and maintaining existing wind power plants. According to AWEA, the

California wind industry pays more than \$31 million each year in salaries to its employees, and also contributes to local economies by paying roughly \$6.7 million in property taxes.

Like biomass, wind is a form of renewable energy that has special implications for farmers and rural communities — in this case, mainly because large wind farms have to be sited in relatively open countryside.

"Alone among the alternative energy technologies, wind power offers utilities pollution-free electricity that is nearly cost-competitive with today's conventional sources."

— Electric Power Research Institute, quoted on the CREST internet site

Success Stories

Renewable Power for the Midwest

Utility-scale generation of electricity from wind is particularly suited to the rural areas of the upper Midwest because of the region's tremendous wind resources and wide-open spaces.

In 1994, Northern States Power, Minnesota's largest investor-owned utility, committed to developing at least 425 MW of wind energy capacity by the year 2002. But commercial wind development on *any* scale was new to this region, and there was some uncertainty about what farmers and other residents would think about this.

So, in 1995, The Minnesota Project and the Clean Water Fund conducted a survey of area residents, primarily rural landowners, including a group of farmers from the Buffalo Ridge area of southwest Minnesota where development of a 25-MW wind power plant was already under way. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

"Wind development is almost unanimously supported by rural residents. They like the environmental benefits of wind energy, and they love the possibilities of injecting income and jobs into rural communities."

— *Harvesting the Wind*, a 1995 survey by The Minnesota Project and the Clean Water Fund

Of the 149 residents surveyed, 98% were in favor of developing wind resources for electricity, and 92% felt that renewable energy production could be a significant part of rural economic development — the reasons cited included income generation for landowners and communities (87% of respondents) and job creation (71%).