

Taking a 'chance' on wind

By FRAN O'LEARY

WHEN Beaver Dam farmers Charles Hammer and Nancy Kavazanjian first started looking into enhancing their crop operation with renewable energy, the Focus on Energy Web site provided them with valuable information.

Site assessment

"People interested in renewable energy need to go to the Focus on Energy Web site," Nancy recommends. "The first step is to get a site assessment done."

Focus on Energy will come out and look at your farm to determine if you have an adequate site to put up a wind turbine or install solar panels. If your site is approved, Focus on Energy will reimburse you for the cost of the site assessment.

"We originally wanted to put the turbine at our main farm, but it wasn't the best site because there were too many trees and buildings," Nancy explains.

The site Focus on Energy selected is located on a second farm the couple owns about two miles from their main farm. They also have a grain storage system there.

"It's up on a hill, there are not a lot of trees, and there's only one building," Charles says of the location where the 120-foot-tall wind turbine is being erected.

Key Points

- Couple contacted Focus on Energy to do a site assessment.
- The name for their wind project comes from their names.
- They have been innovative in many farm practices.

The couple will learn within a couple of weeks whether their \$20,000 Renewable Energy for America Program grant is approved by the USDA.

"We're actually halfway there," Nancy says. "We have a commitment from Focus on Energy for their Cash-Back Rewards program. Now we're just waiting to hear from USDA on the REAP grant."

Nancy credits the staff at the USDA Rural Development office in Stevens Point with helping her fill out the necessary paperwork for the grant.

"I can't say enough for the ladies at the Rural Development office," Nancy says. "I've never written a grant before, but they held a webinar that provides templates to work with. They even called me several times requesting documents to complete the process. Without their help, I never would have gotten it done."

True innovators

Charles and Nancy decided to name their wind project "Chance Wind."



WIND ADVISER: Randy Faller (center) talks to Nancy Kavazanjian and Charles Hammer while workers begin erecting the wind turbine on the couple's farm.

"'Chance' comes from combining our first names, and we really do feel like we're taking a chance," Nancy says.

But being the farming innovators that they are, this isn't the first chance the couple has taken.

"We feel like we've always been innovators," Charles says.

"Charlie was the first farmer to no-till soybeans into cornstalks back in the 1980s," Nancy explains. "Now it's a common practice. He was the first farmer in our area to go to 20-inch rows 10 years ago, but with reduced tillage he learned there was too much residue, so we switched back to 30-inch rows."

"When you're an innovator, some things you try don't always work out, but you learn and go on," she adds. "Now we're the first farmers in the area to be zone tilling and using GPS to apply fertilizer and weed control."

Reaping the benefits

Once the wind turbine begins operating, the electricity it produces will be sold back to Alliant Energy on the grid.

"The payback is relatively high," Nancy says. "They're paying us 11 cents per kilowatt, which is the residential rate. That's what we pay them for our electricity on our farm, and the energy we produce will offset about 75% of our annual farm usage."

Evaluate renewable energy's potential

A certified site assessor can help determine whether your home or business property is a good location for a renewable energy system. Site assessors provide specific information about energy efficiency and how renewable energy systems (solar electric, wind and solar hot water) can be used at a home or business location to help meet your energy needs.

Focus on Energy helped create a unique Wisconsin program that trains and certifies professional renewable energy site assessors. These assessors will visit your property and analyze its renewable energy potential, providing unbiased information on a variety of systems and their suitability to your property and energy needs.

Prep for assessment

There are several things you can do to prepare for a site assessment. To fully analyze your site, the assessor may need to inspect the roof, attic, utility room, garage and basement. Make sure these areas are accessible. The assessor also will need information about your energy use and

may request to see records of past usage. This can usually be obtained from your utility.

Having this information available will assist the assessor in accurately evaluating your energy needs.

The assessor also can answer specific questions you might have on renewable energy systems. Some assessors can evaluate multiple technologies during your site assessment; keep this in mind when determining what assessor to hire.

The assessor will provide:

- a basic analysis of your energy needs
- recommendations for energy efficiency to help lower your energy use and reduce the size of the renewable energy system you need
- an evaluation of the renewable energy resource at your site
- recommendations for size and type of renewable energy system
- estimated output of the renewable energy system
- information on the best place to site your system and estimated cost

Learn more at focusonenergy.com/siteassessments.



FARM POWER: Workers build the footings for the 120-foot-tall wind turbine that is being put up at the Hammer and Kavazanjian farm near Beaver Dam.