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Windmill comeback to generate power for Auburn farm

(by Joan Demirjian - May 26, 2010)



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By JOAN DEMIRJIAN

In the past, many farms relied on windmills to pump water. A farm in Auburn Township is going back to the tradition of using wind, this time for generating power.

Tom and Diane Jones at Wind in the Woods farm are working on a plan to have a 10-kilowatt, 120-foot wind turbine installed to generate power for the farm.

Expedite Renewable Energy, of Moreland Hills, is partnering with Sureenergy, a Sandusky-based company, on the project.

The Joneses breed, train, sell and show purebred and half-Arabian horses on the farm off Munn Road. They also hold pony parties, give riding lessons, have events for special-needs children and summer camps at the site.

They have operated the farm for 15 years on 20 acres, which is part of an old farm with a hayfield. An apple orchard remains visible.

At an altitude of 1,250 feet, the site is the second highest in Auburn.

It is a windy spot, hence the farm's name. The highest site in the township is Auburn Springs Country Club, the Joneses said they have been told.

In the winter, the farm is expected to generate a good supply of energy, they said.

"We'll catch all the storm systems going across the farm here," Mr. Jones said. "Generally, our wind speed is 12 to 20 mph in the winter, and sometimes more."

They always have been interested in conserving energy, Mrs. Jones said. They grow their own hay supply and use shredded recycled paper for horse bedding, which is biodegradable.

Shredded paper and telephone books are donated by several sources, including the Geauga County Public Library system.

One of their farm's Web site pages is dedicated to being green, they said.

When they learned of an increase in the availability of grants and loans for wind turbines, they decided in February to move ahead with a plan.

They have obtained an agricultural exemption from the township for the wind turbine. The acreage is not part of a

subdivision and agricultural uses do not fall under zoning.

Mr. Jones said the location in the field behind the main barn has undergone soil tests and is adequate to support the tower.

The Joneses will use the turbine for heating and lighting at the farm. And they are considering the possibility of an all-electric pickup truck as well as electricity for the house in the future, Mr. Jones said.

In the plan, the excess power generated in the winter will be used by Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co. and Wind in the Woods farm will be reimbursed later. They do not expect to need to use energy provided by CEI.

They hope it will be a model to inspire others and they will put a photo of the turbine on their business card. "It feels like the right thing to do," Mrs. Jones said.

"There was a time when every farm had windmills to pump water," Mr. Jones said. "It's nothing new."

It is an attempt to be more innovative when it comes to conserving energy, Mrs. Jones said. "We truly believe it is a responsible thing to do."

According to a directive by the federal government, by the year 2025, one-quarter of the nation's energy needs are to be supplied by renewable energy, she said.

Stefanie Penn Spear, president of Expedite Renewable Energy, said they are working on grants through the Ohio Department of Development Advanced Energy Fund and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

If the grants were awarded, the turbine would be installed in the fall.

Wind in the Woods Farm is an early adopter of wind energy and is showing that it is viable for businesses to generate their own electricity and rely on cleaner, renewable sources of power, she said.

In another project, Sheoga Hardwood Flooring and Paneling in Middlefield Township, is investing in a 750-kilowatt wind turbine to power 90 percent of its electricity needs, Ms. Spear said.

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