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Going green

By **FRAN O'LEARY**

Key Points

- Couple has studied wind energy for three years.
- If they qualify for grants, the payback period will be 11 years.
- They applied for a REAP grant to help pay for their turbine.

WHAT Charles Hammer and his wife, Nancy Kavazanjian, were looking for was a way to utilize renewable energy on their 1,860-acre Dodge County crop farm. The couple has studied the benefits of renewable energy for the past three years.

"We went to the Midwest Energy Fair, and that's where we first saw personal energy turbines," Nancy says. "We thought solar would be the ticket, but our farm energy assessment showed that the solar payback was 25 to 30 years. It was a lot longer than wind. We were surprised and disappointed because it's so expensive."

The payback on a wind turbine is 22 years. However, if Nancy and Charles qualify for grants for the turbine through Focus on Energy and the Renewable Energy for America Program, the payback period will be cut in half to 11 years. The REAP grant they applied for is $20,000.

"Personal wind energy systems aren't cheap, but if you can get the grants, it really helps," Nancy says.

Gathering information

After settling on wind, Charles and Nancy did their homework.

"Charlie talked to several people and I talked to several consultants, including Mick Sagrillo, a well-known wind authority who works with Renew Wisconsin, about different systems," Nancy says. "The turbine we ended up getting was actually our second choice, but was the one our wind adviser, Randy Faller, recommended. So we put our faith in him. He's putting up the same system for himself, and that was good enough for us."

Randy helped Nancy and Charles with the technical portion of their REAP grant application. He also oversaw construction of the project.

"But the main selling point is that Randy is putting in the same turbine, and we have a contract with him for maintenance because we don't want to be climbing 120 feet in the air to fix something," Charles says.

They look at the wind turbine as an investment not only in their farm, but also in something more. "If you put the money in a 401(k) or an IRA, the return isn't too good right now," Nancy says. "But this is an investment in our future and in America. This is part of the legacy we will leave our kids."

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WIND INNOVATORS: Nancy Kavazanjian and Charles Hammer are building a 12 wind energy system on their Dodge County farm near Beaver Dam.

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."

"'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 *focuson energy.com/siteassessments.*

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