

In their own words: what Midwesterners are saying on wind power

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The energy sector can be a technical and wonky place, with a lot of jargon around public utilities commission dockets, integrated resource plans, and electricity rate design and transmission issues.

But renewable sources of energy like wind and solar do something remarkable - they safely enable energy production to be shifted from faraway centralized plants to local homes, farms, churches, businesses, and communities. And that's providing a chance for more people in many more places to get involved in this important part of the U.S. economy.

During this first ever American Wind Week - a week devoted to talking about wind energy -- let's hear what some of the people involved with wind energy around the Midwest have had to say in recent months in the news, on blogs, and at local meetings, hearings and events, in their own words:

"That's income they can count on, rain or shine."

That's [Christina Dexter](#), with the South Dakota Farmers Union, talking about the millions of dollars in lease payments helping ranchers and farmers in her state who are hosting turbines on their land. In South Dakota, wind is currently providing about 30 percent of the state's electricity, and supports nearly 2,000 jobs.

"Having windmills on your property might generate \$30,000 a year, and that money goes directly back into the community. Whether it's in goods or services, to the auto dealership or upgrading your house, it's a huge financial benefit to the community."

That's [John Hardman](#), a farmer in Gratiot County in central Michigan, where a wind project has

helped make possible infrastructure upgrades like roads as well as better support for fire and rescue, road maintenance, and schools.

"The wind farms, for our district, have been a wonderful contribution to the educational capabilities that we have here at Akron-Fairgrove."

That's [Diane Foster](#), superintendent of the Akron-Fairgrove Public School District in Michigan's 'thumb' region. School upgrades made possible by revenues from wind farms have included addition of a drama program and stage for school and community productions, a new technology program, a new community center at the high school, and upgrades to school entries, electrical, lighting, buses, lockers, windows, boilers, bleachers, and parking lots.

According to the American Wind Energy Association's analysis of Michigan Department of Treasury data for 2011-2015, [countywide tax bases increased](#) by 38 percent, 34 percent and 26 percent, respectively, in the three Michigan counties where wind development is most active (Gratiot, Huron and Tuscola counties). In addition to tax revenues from wind projects, there's also economic stimulus during the construction phase. The Gratiot County Wind project in Michigan generated more than \$30 million in direct payments to Michigan construction contractors and material and equipment suppliers, [according to DTE Energy](#), and about three quarters of a million dollars was spent with local suppliers for food, lodging and other expenses.

"We have generations of farmers in our community. We all know the challenge of agriculture, considering weather, markets and production. For some farmers it's becoming a financial burden to bring children into the operation. Now wind energy is offering these families an additional way to help support future generations of farmers."

That's Dick Kirksey, a resident in Clay County, Iowa, who [spoke recently](#) along with other area residents at a local zoning commission meeting considering a new wind project expected to provide power for about 100,000 homes for 30 years, generate \$40 million in landowner payments and 250 full-time jobs during construction.

The Republican governor of Iowa, Kim Reynolds, just recently authored a [column](#) outlining why her state emphasizes wind and solar. "We've found that renewable energy distinguishes Iowa from other industrialized states competing for projects. That's why we don't just mention wind energy on recruitment trips - we lead with it," Governor Reynolds wrote. "Last year, nearly 37 percent of Iowa's power came from wind. Wind energy brings 9,000 jobs and more than \$13.5 billion in investments -- and we've done it all without sacrificing price or reliability. In fact, Iowa has the [most reliable electric grid](#) in the country."

"You might recognize Republic, because it looks a lot like rural America. We have two mom and pop restaurants, a lumber yard and a hardware store, a local elevator that supports farmers and agriculture. There's no manufacturing, there's no retail outlet stores in Republic. The wind project is extremely important to our community. My friends and neighbors look forward to the opportunity to farm the wind as a resource and let that resource provide for their families."

That's [Gary Baldosser](#) - who farms corn, soybeans, wheat and cattle in the village of Republic in Seneca County, Ohio - telling state legislators why he wants to participate in a new wind project being proposed for his area. Baldosser, a fourth-generation farmer and 27-year volunteer firefighter, explained in his testimony to state officials how important the diversification of income will be toward being able to give the next generation the opportunity to continue farming.

"Wind has become very, very important to Mower County, its taxpayers and our environment."

That's [Tim Gabrielson](#), Chairman of the Board of Commissioners for Mower County, Minnesota. Wind projects in Mower County have contributed \$2.3 million in tax revenue, about \$400,000 of which is going toward funding local road and bridge work, and the remainder toward tax relief for residents. Statewide, Minnesota has seen nearly [\\$7 billion in investment from wind](#), and the state now ranks in the top 10 nationally for both wind installations and the total share of electrical generation being produced by wind turbines.

"In Minnesota, wind-related jobs are found from corner to corner. The Port of Duluth expertly handles wind turbine component shipments, our railroads and specialized trucking companies transport parts across the nation. And, steel from our Iron Range is used to manufacture towers in Wisconsin."

That's Chris Thomas, who lives in Hadley/Lake Wilson in southwestern Minnesota and works for EDF Renewable Energy. Chris moved with his family to Minnesota about 10 years ago because of his experience in wind energy the potential in the state for his and his family's future. "My children attended school in Minnesota, and we bought and remodeled a home here. We are grateful for my job and opportunities and benefits that we have," Chris wrote in a [column](#) in the *Marshall Independent* on Minnesota jobs and economic activity connected to the wind industry.

Those are just some of the voices being heard on wind energy around our region recently. We know there will continue to be many, many more.