



**WESTERN RESOURCE
ADVOCATES**

CLEAN ENERGY PIONEERS

Pioneering a new frontier of economic opportunity to build a vibrant clean energy economy.

In Partnership with:

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ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND

finding the ways that work



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN
FARMERS UNION**

The Clean Energy Pioneers project documents the leadership demonstrated by citizens of the West in developing renewable energy and promoting a clean energy economy.

Each newsletter in this series will focus on a western state's story of success.

Through this project, Western Resource Advocates, Environmental Defense Fund and Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union hopes to encourage additional development of clean, renewable energy from the grassroots on up and from government and business on down.

For more information on the Clean Energy Pioneers program, click onto www.cleanenergypioneers.com.



Photo courtesy of Logan County

GREENER PASTURES

Northeastern Colorado is rapidly developing into one of the largest wind energy producing regions of the country.

Edward Koester, 60, knows the tough life of a farmer in Logan County, a high plains frontier in northeastern Colorado. One big hailstorm can ruin a year's crop, snow can bury a building, drought sucks life from soil, and he killed eight rattlesnakes in his yard last year.

About the only thing that comes easy is the wind, which heaps tumbleweeds on fences and fills pockets with money.

The region that includes Logan County is rapidly developing into one of the largest wind energy producing regions of the country. Energy companies, farmers, and ranchers have partnered to capture what the National Renewable Energy Laboratory rates as some of the nation's best winds blowing across southern Wyoming, western Nebraska and northeastern Colorado. The new development is creating jobs, building tax revenue, and reducing global warming gases.

Renewable energy provides security for farm families

For clean energy pioneers like Koester, renewable energy development is key to keeping the family farm. He and his wife grow millet and wheat on 320 acres his father once farmed, but it's not enough to pay the bills. So, by day he drives a road grader for the county, and his wife works at the grain elevator in nearby



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Peetz; they farm during evenings and weekends. He wonders how long he can sustain the workload or when he'll retire. His solution: use the land to grow windmills.

"A guy called me about 6 years ago and said, 'If you put turbines on your place, we'll pay you,'" Koester

Across the West, individuals, schools, businesses, and communities are harnessing innovative ideas to build a new clean energy economy.

said. "It's very trying to make a living on a farm, so you got to do something else, so we wanted to look at it. Everyone I know who has the windmills likes them be-

cause they bring in a little extra money," he said.

He signed a long-term contract with Florida Power & Light Energy Co., to host three towering, 2.3 megawatt windmills, which he estimates will pay him about \$20,000 annually. That's a decent chunk in a county where, government statistics show, the median household income is about \$38,000, and one in eight residents live below the poverty level.

Wind generates jobs and revenue in North East Colorado

The nearby 400 megawatt Peetz Table Wind Energy Center, built in 2007, is the cornerstone of renewable energy development in Logan County, about 120 miles east of Denver. In nearby Fleming, the Colorado Highlands Wind LLC plans to build 69 turbines. By the end of this year, 645 wind turbines will straddle the county's northern border, supplying 700 megawatts, or enough electricity for 200,000 homes, according to research by Colorado State University Extension.

"These are the largest construction projects in the history of the county," said Rich O'Connell, director of the Logan County Economic Development Corp. "Wind energy generates income for families and it grows the tax base to build roads, bridges, schools and social services," he said

How much is wind power worth to the county today? About \$2.3 million annually in property taxes, an average of \$5,000 in annual easement payments to landowners, and about a \$400,000 increase in tax base for every 100 megawatts produced, according to O'Connell. New projects could nearly double those figures, plus hundreds of jobs to build and maintain wind turbines and transmission lines.



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Groups such as the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union organize ranchers and farmers into “land-owner wind associations” to help Western ranchers and farmers negotiate better rates with energy companies.

Wind associations give power to rural land-owners

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Seizing opportunity, groups such as the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union organize ranchers and farmers into “land-owner wind associations” to help western ranchers and farmers negotiate better rates with energy companies. “It’s a better model, it allows us to grow more renewable power over a wider area and, no pun intended, it’s more power to us,” said Bill Midcap of the Union. The organization has 23,000 members in Wyoming, New Mexico and Colorado.

Even conservative rural power associations, typically reliant on fossil fuels for customers, are warming to clean power. For example, the Highline Electric Association in nearby Phillips County, CO, has a project to recover waste energy from two turbines that compress natural gas, generating 3.5 megawatts, or about 5 percent of the power the association provides customers, while saving up to \$500,000 per year, according to Mark Farnsworth, Highline’s general manager. Landowners like Koester don’t fuss much over national en-

vironmental policy, the fate of the planet or utility corporate plans. He’s focused on his own bottom line.

“I’m doing it because they came along and asked me, and they are doing it because the government says we need more renewable energy,” Koester said. “This is the cleanest energy you can get, it don’t take one gallon of fuel, so when they (energy companies) come along and had those towers, everybody jumped on them. Nobody gripes about them at all, and everybody that’s got them is plum happy.”



See how clean energy is providing financial security for families.

Click the icon to watch the video (4 min.)

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