



Wind powers North Dakota's future

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These days, family budgets are tight, and so are the budgets of rural counties and townships. Too often, the margins are too thin; a family's unexpected expense can become a huge burden, or a school district may not have the finances to provide students with the first-rate education facilities they deserve.

As communities struggle to meet the needs for both today's families and for future generations, one new source of revenue and investment is increasingly becoming a lifeline in the Midwest: wind power.

When a wind farm comes to a community, it brings a variety of resources that can help to ensure a better tomorrow.

These start with lease payments to landowners who host wind turbines on their property.

In North Dakota, lease payments total \$5.7 million every year and could exceed three times that amount by 2030 with continued growth. Wind turbines serve as a drought-resistant cash crop in years when the rains don't fall or fields don't produce. They provide a source of financial stability for families during lean years or an added bonus in times of plenty. Often, they can be the difference between keeping a farm in the family and having to sell it.

"The wind farm allowed us to be able to keep our family farm. We had come to a point where it no longer made financial sense to keep the property even with its vast sentimental value," explained Jason Wilson, a fourth-generation farmer from Calhan, Colo. "The wind farm balanced the financial viability with the sentimental value, allowing the family farm to be continued to be passed on to the next generation."

Wind farms benefit more than just the landowners who host them; they benefit the whole community.

Indeed, when you drive across North Dakota and see those wind turbines spinning in the distance, they are generating more than just clean energy -- they also generate increased property tax revenues for those communities.

In North Dakota, by 2030 wind energy could increase property tax revenues by over \$37 million every year. With this new revenue, communities can maintain and repair roads and bridges, and improve public safety and emergency services.

Growing wind power in the state also means fewer expenses every month for North Dakota families and businesses. Through 2050, wind could save consumers nearly \$4.5 billion on their electric bills, and another \$1.2 billion by protecting them from conventional fuel price spikes. This is because wind energy is cost effective to install and, once installed, wind energy facilities have zero fuel cost.

Plus, local labor is needed to construct, then operate and maintain a wind farm, and that means new well-paying jobs, with benefits, within the local community. Wind farms provide new opportunities for young people in Rural America, so they don't have to move to the "big city" to find jobs that will support their families.

Wind power already supports up to 3,000 jobs in North Dakota, and wind turbine technician is the country's fastest growing occupation, expected to increase by 108 percent over the next 10 years.

Compare this with the second fastest growing job in the U.S., an occupational therapist assistant, which is only expected to increase by 42 percent. Expanding wind power in North Dakota means expanding these opportunities.

Wind power has a lot to offer: lease payments, increased property tax revenue, consumer savings, and more well-paying jobs.

Added together, these benefits can ensure a better tomorrow for communities across North Dakota. And that's something we can all support.

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