

National initiative advocates cleaner, domestic sources of power

By Dale Arnold

Can the United States have 25 percent of the total energy it consumes come from renewable sources by 2025? It's a lofty goal, but it has tremendous support.

Both state and national public opinion polls conducted over the last two years show that upwards of 85 percent of consumers thought this goal was important and 90 percent felt it was achievable. An initiative known as 25x'25 is now working to make it a reality.

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF) is part of a coalition of more than 300 groups that are backing the program. OFBF is part of the Ohio 25x'25 Steering Committee. The Ohio Soybean and Corn Growers Associations, Farmers Union, USDA-Rural Development, The Ohio State University, Buckeye Power and other government agencies, consumers groups, researchers and energy service providers are involved in the initiative. These efforts also have the support of Congress.

Initiative members know that there is no "silver bullet;" some overall technology out there in development that will solve all of our energy challenges. However, 25x'25 is a great, coordinated plan.

Initiative members are researching and implementing a plan that looks to a wide range of renewable energy sources that can be produced in Ohio such

as wind and solar. The program also looks to produce energy from biomass, which includes livestock waste, crops and other plant material.

Ohio agriculture and supporting organizations under 25x'25 are not looking to be dominant in one particular type of fuel or energy source. Group members are going to support being a player in several. Ohio's natural resources, agribusiness base, manufacturing capacities and access to the electrical grid makes it an ideal location to produce energy from renewable sources.

Arguments in favor of developing renewable energy are numerous. With the United States projected to import up to 70 percent of its oil within the next two decades, and two thirds of the world's oil produced in the Middle East, national security remains a concern.

In addition to clean energy from solar and wind sources, biofuels can help reduce pollutants including carbon monoxide, particulate matter and toxic emissions.

Backers of the initiative estimate that by 2020, wind energy alone could create 80,000 new jobs and \$1.2 billion in new income in the United States. Ohio is second only to California in its capacity to manufacture the parts used in wind turbines.

While farmland will be required for many of these energy sources, the 25x'25 vision includes "continuing to produce safe, abundant, and affordable food, feed and fiber.

In November, OFBF helped sponsor the first *Ohio Renewable Energy Summit* at Ohio State University. The event brought close to 200 government, agricultural, environmental and industry leaders as well as others who are concerned about the energy situation in the United States. Other activities and programs for 2007 are now in the planning stages.

Bill Richards, retired national leader with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and farmer near Circleville, Ohio and is co-chair of the 25x25 state steering committee, said that this is not just the start of another energy organization. He is optimistic that farmers, conservation and environmental groups will be able to rally around a solution to America's energy problems.

"Expensive energy is just going to bring a whole different world to all of us," he said.

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Sidebar

America's Renewable Energy Potential

- Hydropower – Flowing water that is used to spin turbines already provides nearly 7 percent of U.S. electricity. It is the nation's largest renewable energy source.
- Wind – About six percent of the contiguous U.S. land area is considered good for installing wind turbines. This area has the potential to supply more than 150% of the nation's current energy needs. Turbines take up only a small portion of that area, allowing the land to remain in use for agriculture.
- Solar – Installing solar panels over a high sunlight area of about 100 square miles could meet the United States current demand for electricity.
- Biofuels – Ethanol made from corn and other plant material and biodiesel made from soybeans could replace 25 percent of U.S. gasoline and diesel use by 2025.
- Geothermal Energy – It is estimated that thermal energy, which is carried in very hot water via wells or fissures in the earth's crust, will be able to provide 10 million households with electricity within 10 years.

Source: www.25x25.org