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Growing farm energy

NORTHWEST Ohio is getting in on the business of renewable energy technology, with innovative use of farm-animal waste as one new source of electricity and wind power as another. Farmers in Williams and Mercer counties are about to join others nationwide in the effort to bolster energy supplies and the fight against air and water pollution at the same time. The chicken and beef these farmers provide for our dinner tables expect to soon be the source of the electricity for cooking.

Methane gas from animal manure causes air pollution, and the manure itself can contribute to groundwater pollution. But anaerobic digesters, devices that capture the gas so it can be converted into electricity, will be installed at the Bridgewater Dairy in Williams County, the Wenning Poultry farm in Mercer County, as well as dairy and beef operations in Harrison County in eastern Ohio.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is giving \$500,000 to each of the farms to help pay for the technology. In the last two years, the number of digesters on U.S. farms has doubled to about 135. Together each year, they produce enough electricity for 20,000 average-size homes. Wood County, where the city of Bowling Green has been pioneering the use of wind energy, has a proposal for another wind farm. Developers JW Great Lakes Wind LLC of Cleveland and American Municipal Power-Ohio want to install 33 wind turbines south of Bowling Green. They would produce 49 megawatts, nearly seven times the energy produced by the four run by the city. Details are due by the end of the year. That's about the same time the Bridgewater farm expects a methane digester to be in operation.

Both projects hold serious promise to keep Ohio in the fore of alternative energy technology.