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Grant to help pay for three wind turbines

Thu, 10/27/2005 - 1:00pm | [Jodi Heckel](#)

URBANA – The University of Illinois is getting \$2 million to help pay for putting three wind turbines on the South Farms.

UI officials learned Monday they will receive a \$2 million grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation for the project. They believe it will be the first of its kind for a university.

"While there are other universities around the country that have wind turbines that they use, we're aware of only single turbine units and they are not owned and operated by the campus," said Matt Malten, the UI's sustainability coordinator. "As far as we know, we're one of the first – if not the first – universities in the country to have a multiple turbine wind farm that's owned and operated (by the university) and on the campus. We're really excited. What we're doing is really on the cutting edge."

The turbines will be installed near the new beef and sheep complex at Old Church Road and South Race Street, although the exact location is still being discussed. They will generate energy for the UI, but that is only part of their purpose.

"We also hope they will be used by faculty and students for teaching and research, and that farmers will be able to benefit from the information we learn as result of putting those turbines up," said David Schejbal, associate vice chancellor and co-chairman of the UI's Committee on a Sustainable Campus Environment.

The three wind turbines would be connected to the UI's power grid and, at full capacity, would generate about 2.7 percent of the energy needs of the campus, Malten said. The UI used 396 million kilowatt-hours of electricity in the 2004 fiscal year.

The UI produces all but a small portion of the power it uses.

Malten said the energy produced by the wind turbines would offset either some of the UI's natural gas use at its power plant or some of the energy it buys.

A study found the turbines, because they are an intermittent source of energy dependent on the wind, would produce about 26 percent of the energy that a traditional power plant operating 24 hours a day would produce, Malten said.

"That's very good for where it will be physically located in the state," he said.

In addition to producing energy for the campus, the wind turbines would serve as a demonstration to farmers.

"They will allow farmers to come in and see how these work on a working farm and see how they affect grain and livestock operations," Malten said.

Researchers in the engineering and agriculture colleges would also use them to look at their design and efficiency, and their impact on agriculture and bird migrations and other wildlife.

The projected budget for the wind turbines is \$5.7 million. In addition to the grant, a \$2-per-semester student clean energy fee, which students began paying in the fall of 2003, has raised \$300,000 that will be used for the project. Student interest in wind turbines was the catalyst for the project and for the student clean energy fee.

"Even though the student dollar contribution is small as part of the total budget, they played a very significant role in the project as a whole," Malten said.

An initial study estimated the turbines would pay for themselves in about 14 years, Malten said, but natural gas prices almost doubled by the time the proposal for the turbines was submitted. Now officials believe the turbines could pay for themselves in 10 years or less, if natural gas prices stay high.

"We think it's a good investment, not just for dollars, but for research," Malten said.

The manufacturers have a backlog of orders so it could be 2007 before the turbines at the UI could be installed.

"We're excited to make it a success and a great learning tool for the entire state," Malten said. "I think wind energy is an important energy source for the state of Illinois."

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