

# Michigan's First Commercial-Scale Wind Farm Gets Planted in the "Thumb"

By Susan Sturtz, Pigeon, Michigan

Say John Deere and most folks think green tractors and farm implements. But in Huron County at the tip of Michigan's "thumb," John Deere isn't just churning up farm land anymore. Now its helping harvest the wind.

This spring access lanes were built and construction began on Michigan's first commercial-scale wind farm. Progress was well underway by late August as the first seven turbines could be seen from miles away towering above the tallest corn fields, trees and utility poles. "They're shooting up at a rate of approximately one every couple days or so," one resident said. "Sort of like watching a sprout push its way through the earth's crust and unfold its petals in a time-lapsed film."

On any given day, right around noon, you can spot a car or two pulled off to the shoulder and the driver munching his lunch while watching the activity. Some folks have taken to inviting neighbors and friends over to set a spell in the yard and watch while yellow-vested workers piece together a tower and a giant crane helps hoists the three blades into place. Each blade is so long that they had to be railed in by freight train to a spot for unloading between the villages of Elkton and Pigeon. From there they are hauled to work sites on flatbed trailers that can barely navigate the turn from one wide-ditched two lane county road to another.

Once completed, the Harvest Wind Farm will boast a bumper crop of 32 of the renewable energy wind giants spaced across 3,200 agricultural acres leased from a half-dozen or so local farmers. Total project capacity for the Vestas V82 wind turbines will be 52.8 megawatts, enough to produce electricity for more than 15,000 homes. Company and government sources expect the \$90 million project, in development for over three years, to begin operating in early 2008. An estimated 80 jobs will be created during the various construction phases, with several permanent employees eventually needed to operate and maintain the farm after completion.

Project plans haven't been without controversy. Based on comments at public hearings and penned in letters to the editors to area newspapers, it appears most locals voicing concerns cite technological uncertainty and the potential unreliability of sufficient wind and such newfangled contraptions as reason enough to thwart planting a wind farm. Complaints reminiscent of those made

by some well-intentioned nay-sayers when the first horseless carriages began rumbling their way down rutted dirt roads.

So, where does John Deere fit into all this? John Deere Wind Energy, a business unit of John Deere Credit, the financial services arm of Deere & Company, is the facility's principle owner and is serving as the project developer. According to a report in Wind Energy Weekly, the facility is benefiting from a state tax incentive package worth \$6.5 million over 12 years, as well as approximately \$5 million in sales tax exemptions through Michigan's manufacturing-industrial processing exemption.

Wolverine Power Cooperative, based in Cadillac, is purchasing energy produced by the Harvest Wind Farm under a 20-year purchase power agreement. Wolverine will then sell the energy to its member-companies and their member-companies throughout Michigan. Wolverine's members include: Cherryland Electric Cooperative (Grawn), Great Lakes Energy (Boyne City), HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative (Portland), Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op (Onaway), Spartan Renewable Energy (Cadillac), and Wolverine Power Marketing Cooperative (Cadillac).

Wolverine plans to explore other renewable energy projects in the state. "We plan to take what we have learned from the Harvest Wind Farm project and apply it to studying the potential for a wind project near Rogers City," said Eric D. Baker, president and CEO of Wolverine, in a June 6th press release. "Renewable power has an important role to play, along with other technologies available today, in the creation of a more balanced and cleaner electric generation in Michigan."

At a June 11, 2007 press conference, Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm said, "Projects like the Harvest Wind Farm, the first of its kind in Michigan, and investments in the alternative energy industry are key to our economic future. They create jobs and help diversify our



economy – two top priorities for Michigan."

She noted also, "Our infrastructure has aged and our ability to produce energy will not be able to keep pace with demand, which is a formula for rising costs. At the same time, we have enormous opportunities that we can take advantage of given that Michigan has the wind potential."

Want to know more about establishing a wind farm in your neck of woods? You can find information and applications on the Deere & Co. web site, [www.deere.com](http://www.deere.com) for developers and those with land to lease.

For those with more modest dreams of wind farming interested in building their own working wind towers check out the *Poor Man's Guide to Wind Power and Battery Systems*, available as a downloadable e-book at [www.poormansguides.com](http://www.poormansguides.com), or the *Renewable Energy Solutions E-Book* on the OffGrid Living website at [www.off-grid-living.com](http://www.off-grid-living.com).

Pictures By: Robin Lindenberg

