



Increasing visibility of energy conservation and renewable energy on Iowa's small to mid-sized farms

Abstract: The Farm Energy Working Group (FEWG) provides a one-stop shop for information and expertise on meeting on-farm energy needs. FEWG has increased communication among individuals and organizations interested in on-farm energy, including farmers, utility representatives, policy organizations, Extension Service, higher education institutions, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), farm organizations and renewable energy businesses.

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The Farm Energy Working Group's demonstration grants, field days and webinars show what Iowa farmers and others are doing to increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy. Partnering with farm organizations helped inform a broader audience. The networking that occurs through FEWG does not happen anywhere else in the state.

What was done and why?

As energy costs rise, farmers want ideas on how to reduce their energy use to save money and to rely more on other energy sources. Use of on-farm resources has been a guiding principle of sustainable farming practices. Tapping energy available on the farm has the potential to significantly reduce risks of price uncertainties and supply disruptions, while promoting self-reliance.

Objectives for this one-year project:

- Hold three to four FEWG meetings during the year, including one in western Iowa, to broaden the participant base across the state.
- Offer two to three webinars on farm energy topics.
- Offer two mini-grant opportunities to farmers interested in demonstrating innovative ways to reduce farm energy use and replacing it with efficiency, conservation and renewable energy practices.

What did we learn?

- FEWG brought together 20 or more participants for meetings twice during 2013 and increased the numbers of farmers reached by 35.
- FEWG wrote and distributed four electronic newsletters to the list of participants. Multiple invitations and announcements regarding meetings, webinars, etc. were transmitted.
- FEWG produced two new case studies of 2013 mini-grant recipients. A third is in the works on the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation's robotic milking system and its energy use when that project is completed.
- FEWG offered four webinars with 29 to 39 registrants each. Recorded webinars are available on the FEWG website.