



Meeting on-farm energy needs through conservation, efficiency and renewable energy

Abstract: A working group centered on the demonstration and promotion of energy saving practices used meetings, field days and mini-grants to communicate with farmers.

The Farm Energy Working Group used demonstration grants, presentations on successful national efforts, talks by Iowa farmers who are using energy efficient practices and/or renewable energy on their farms to make Iowa farmers aware of their options for and need to reduce fossil fuel use. But a full-fledged statewide program will benefit the state greatly by consistently providing the same farm energy services to all regions of Iowa.

What was done and why?

The original purpose of the Farm Energy Working Group was to respond to the need for small to mid-sized farms to find sources of energy other than fossil fuels. Its mission was to help targeted farms meet a significant part of their own on-farm energy needs through energy efficiency, conservation or renewable resources available on the farm.

The Farm Energy Working Group also aimed to serve as a one-stop shop for information and expertise on meeting on-farm energy needs for these smaller farm operations. Finally, there was a need to increase communication among Iowa farmers and others who support the goals of using energy efficiency and renewable energy, to highlight existing work, to make clear what options and incentives are available to farms and to inspire more work in this area.

Investigators:

Kamyar Enshayan

Carole Yates
Center for Energy and
Environmental
Education
University of Northern
Iowa
Cedar Falls

What did we learn?

- Farmers on small to midsize operations, especially vegetable and fruit growers, increasingly are more interested in options for reducing fossil fuel use, saving money, and using more environmentally sound practices on their farms.
- Many Iowa utilities are supportive of farmers who want to reduce fossil fuel use. Several RECs have rebate/incentive programs around farm energy. Alliant Energy has been a strong partner in the working group and several municipal utilities also are interested in participating.
- Providing small demonstration grants requires a lot of oversight from the project coordinator before, during and after awarding a grant. These grants were intended to be very farmer-friendly, so the working group provided help with writing the grant, called the farmer for updates and compiled that information and offered the farmer the option of a verbal final report, rather than a written one. Participants have been very willing to share their grant work with others and demonstrate once again how innovative farmers are with their ideas and resources.
- The working group needs to reach out more to farmers and go where the farmers are, since it often is difficult for farmers to attend a working group meeting.