

New Program Helps Farms & Businesses in Minnesota Reduce Costs with Renewable Energy & Efficiency

***Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota* program offers free custom project assistance**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statewide MN, Tuesday, June 9, 2015 – Farmers and rural small businesses are essential to the fabric of Minnesota—its economy, environment and communities. Helping them reduce costs with energy efficiency and take control of their energy expenses with renewable energy is the focus of a new program, *Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota*, launching this week with support from USDA Rural Development.

“We’re seeing increased demand for information about renewable energy and energy efficiency improvements, and are excited to offer free project assistance to Minnesotans,” shared Fritz Ebinger, Rural Energy Development Program Manager with the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) and University of Minnesota Extension.

For more than ten years, CERTs has been connecting Minnesotans with the resources they need to plan and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy systems. Through this new program, *Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota*, CERTs will help Minnesota farmers and rural small businesses explore projects that could work for them, identify potential funding and financing options, and get one-on-one assistance on their project.

In particular, CERTs will be helping farms and businesses apply for USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), which offers grants for 25% of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.



Doug and Jane Popp used USDA REAP funding to install solar and wind energy systems on their Royalton dairy farm. CERTs will help more farmers and rural small businesses plan similar projects.

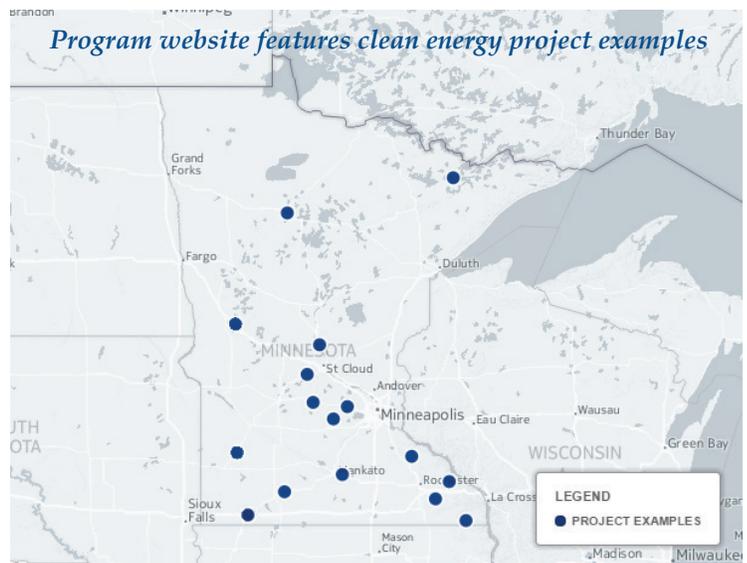
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The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) from USDA Rural Development is a great opportunity for Minnesota farmers and rural businesses to save energy with efficiency work and add renewable energy systems. Applications for renewable energy or energy efficiency grants are due June 30, 2015. Projects requesting grants of \$20,000 (\$80,000 total project cost) can fill out a shorter application and can also turn in applications for an October 31, 2015 deadline. After that the next deadline for all projects is April 30, 2016. So now is the time to apply! As part of *Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota* CERTs has created sample applications with helpful notes to help people apply for REAP funding.

CERTs will also help farms and rural small businesses explore the possibility of PACE financing. Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) is a new way to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades to the buildings of commercial property owners and can be a perfect companion to REAP funding in Minnesota. With PACE, energy-saving measures pursued by the owners receive project financing and are repaid as a separate item on their property tax assessment for a set period. PACE eliminates the burden of upfront costs by providing low-cost, long-term financing. In combination, USDA REAP can cover 25% of project costs, and PACE can finance them without the requirement of upfront capital.

Part of the program is helping people understand what their peers have done so that they can learn from the experiences of others. Examples of successful projects in other parts of the state include Angvall Hardware in Lester Prairie who installed solar PV with funding from USDA REAP and utility rebates; Blue Line Travel Center in Worthington who installed new LED canopy lighting with funding from USDA REAP and PACE; Colonial Cleaners in Worthington who added efficient dryers with USDA REAP and utility rebates; and the Popp Family Farm in Royalton who installed solar PV and wind using USDA REAP and utility rebates.



Interested farmers and small businesses can learn more and get project assistance by visiting the *Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota* website at <http://mncerts.org/GreatRenewables> or by calling Fritz Ebinger at 612-626-1028.

“This program helps increase American energy independence by increasing the private sector supply of renewable energy and decreasing the demand for energy through energy efficiency improvements,” said USDA Rural Development State Director Colleen Landkamer. “Over time, investments like these can also help lower annual energy costs for small businesses and agricultural producers—freeing capital for the bottom line.”

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About CERTs: The Clean Energy Resource Teams—or CERTs—are a statewide partnership with a shared mission to connect individuals and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community-based clean energy projects. We empower communities and their members to adopt energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy technologies and practices for their homes, businesses, and local institutions. CERTs partners include the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, Great Plains Institute, Southwest Regional Development Commission, and the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources.

About Extension: University of Minnesota Extension is creating a stronger Minnesota through education and research. Extension provides practical education and research you can trust, to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills and build a better future. Over 65% of Extension's 800 researchers, educators and staff live and work in greater Minnesota, located at Regional Extension offices, Extension county offices, University research and outreach centers, and University campuses.

About USDA: Renewable Energy for Greater Minnesota is made possible by USDA's Energy Audits – Renewable Energy Development Assistance grant program (EA-REDA). Since 2009, USDA has invested more than \$36.4 million in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in rural communities throughout Minnesota. USDA Rural Development achieves its mission by helping rural individuals, communities and businesses obtain the financial and technical assistance needed to address their diverse and unique needs. EA-REDA grants support programs to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses evaluate energy efficiency systems and determine the feasibility of incorporating renewable energy technologies into their operations. USDA Rural Development also provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase or install renewable energy systems or make energy efficiency improvements through its Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).

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