

CLEAN CHANGE

Green energy projects are sprouting up all over Michigan

By Paul Flower

Illustration by Neil Hubert

What you can do

Read up on green energy news at a site like *The New York Times Green blog* (green.blogs.nytimes.com) or check out a book about how to live a greener lifestyle, such as *Easy Green Living: The Ultimate Guide to Simple, Eco-Friendly Choices for You and Your Home*.

Michigan business leaders are thinking and seeing green, but there's no envy involved. They believe clean energy is a key to the state's economic resurgence and a natural, if not ironic, legacy of its manufacturing history.

President Barack Obama seemed to affirm that attitude when he visited Holland, Michigan, this summer to promote the groundbreaking of a new plant that will produce lithium-ion batteries for use in electric cars.

Green energy projects are sprouting all over the state. Companies, many aided by incentives in the federal stimulus package, are tapping everything from the wind to methane-emitting landfills for power and profits.

Brian Levine, vice president of business development and marketing for WindTronics in Muskegon, says Michigan represents "a perfect storm" of positive factors for the development of his firm's Honeywell wind turbine and other clean energy projects. Typical wind turbines are tall, relatively noisy and obtrusive, and generate power to the electrical grid, but WindTronics' Honeywell wind turbine is a smaller, quieter unit that can generate power in a half-mile-per-hour wind at the point of consumption. Levine's firm plans to mass-produce the turbine for homes and businesses; he said a unit can be assembled in just 10 minutes, an advantage he credits to the state's manufacturing expertise.

"We are in such a wonderful position," Levine says. "Because we're from Michigan, we have access to all of the manufacturing expertise that for so many years was honed for the auto sector. Now we can get the benefit."

Dave Prouty, president of Heat Transfer International in Kentwood, says that while wind power has helped establish Michigan as the nation's leader in clean energy, he believes the state can also lead in his company's specialty: innovative biomass generation systems that convert anything from tree trimmings to animal and industrial waste into electrical power or heat.

"Of the chippers and grinders used for biomass generation, 90 percent are made in central Michigan," Prouty says. "We have a political climate that is supporting moving off fossil fuels. We own the technology. And we have the intellectual capacity. Now it just takes the vision to stay the course."

Levine agrees that the momentum is important. And he sees potential in a supply chain that is transforming from Rust Belt to green.

"Five years ago our suppliers were getting 80 percent of their growth from automotive, now they're getting 20 percent from automotive and 80 percent from new industries," Levine says. "This is the time to take Michigan ingenuity and apply it to new industry." •