



National Farmers Union Region 3 (Ontario)

June 2010 Statement on Renewable Energy and the Ontario Green Energy Act

The National Farmers Union supports the production of energy from renewable, sustainable sources including solar, wind, and low-impact hydro to help conserve the remaining fossil fuel supply and to minimize the environmental impacts of energy extraction and production. We believe the production of renewable energy must be under the control and ownership of farmers, rural communities and the broader public - not in the hands of multinational corporations or private interests.

Our perspective on Renewable Energy Production in Ontario:

Conservation Must Come First:

Although one of the goals of the Ontario Green Energy Act is to create a culture of conservation, this is not the first priority. The focus of the act is on the production of energy, albeit through the production of 'green' energy like wind, solar, hydro and biogas. If conservation of energy was made a top priority, our need to produce more and more energy would decrease. A decrease in the production and extraction of energy, including electricity and fossil fuels, would help lessen the many negative environmental, health, and social impacts of energy production and extraction.

Creating a culture of energy conservation requires a multifaceted approach. The NFU has many policies that although not directly related to renewable energy, if implemented, would lead to a reduction in energy use, for example, increased public transportation, increased use of rail to move cargo, more widespread adoption of organic and low-input farming practices and the development of true local food systems.

Feed-In Tariffs (FITs):

The NFU supports FITs as long as they are applied so that farmers and rural communities benefit. The Feed-In Tariff prices offered at this time by the Ontario Power Authority offer additional benefits to small-scale renewable energy projects through higher prices for microFITs and other small projects.

Ontario Green Energy Act Approvals Process:

Most large scale wind and solar projects will be erected in rural communities. Under the Green Energy Act, large scale solar projects are no longer allowed on class 1 and 2 farmland, a regulation the NFU supports. However, since wind turbines do not use a significant amount of land, most wind turbines are being erected on farm land, and therefore, in rural communities, as 'wind farms'. With few exceptions, wind farms in Ontario are being erected by large energy companies, often from outside Ontario or with backing from outside the province.

The approvals process of the Green Energy Act facilitates the loss of farmer and rural community control over what happens in our communities, especially in relation to industrial wind developments.

Community Consultation Process: The public consultation required under the Renewable Energy Approval process for large wind or solar projects is intended to *'help build local support'* for the project. There is little opportunity through the mandated public consultation process for community members to jointly discuss the pros and cons of the proposed project or to jointly address how they will be impacted by the project. Farmers and rural residents who have legitimate concerns about the impact of industrial wind developments in their backyards find this pseudo-consultation demeaning.

The Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure needs to change the goals and process of the

community consultation requirement of the Green Energy Act. The community consultation process needs to acknowledge community concerns and provide mechanisms to address those concerns. There must be a possibility of a project not proceeding if the community does not feel their concerns have been adequately addressed. In addition the ministry needs to better address community and public concerns about future health issues related to the generation of renewable energy.

Municipal Authority: The approvals process that came into effect with the passage of the Green Energy Act, gives all control over the approval of renewable energy projects, whether those be small or large, to the province. Municipalities, and thus communities, no longer have any control over siting, land use planning, zoning or other community impacts.

Options must be available to acknowledge the impact of large-scale renewable energy projects on the wider community and provide benefits and compensation to the community, not just to wind developers and individual farmers. Planning, permitting and zoning powers must be returned to municipalities so that the wider community has the opportunity to address its broader concerns and negotiate for changes that more fully address the community concerns and/or provide full community compensation.

Control and Ownership of Renewable Energy Production and Distribution:

The NFU believes renewable energy projects must be owned and controlled by local communities and that the profits and benefits of such projects must go to the community and the public at large. Although there are a few community-based cooperative renewable energy projects, the majority of the renewable energy production projects already operating or being erected in the province are owned and operated by private, energy corporations whose decisions are driven primarily by profit.

Ontario's electricity system was developed for the benefit of the people of Ontario, through public ownership of the production and distribution of electrical power. Along with the public ownership of the electrical system, electricity was sold to consumers at cost. In order to facilitate the development of renewable energy, the Green Energy Act increases the cost of electricity to consumers by offering contracts for renewable power that are far above the amount we now pay for electricity. This continues the move away from 'at-cost' hydro, the practice on which Ontario's electrical generation and distribution system was built.

Smaller scale microFIT projects being erected by farmers themselves can be seen as part of the move towards privatization of energy production. However, as these small projects are more likely to remain under the control of farmers and rural communities we support individual generation for personal use and for sales back to the grid. The continuing trend to open the doors to large, private renewable energy producers brings with it a risk that most of the financial benefits of renewable energy production will leave the province, rather than stay in our communities to the benefit of farmers, workers and eaters.

Endnote: This statement on renewable energy and the Green Energy Act is based on NFU national policy and on policy resolutions passed at the Region 3 (Ontario) Convention in March 2010. The Ontario Regional Council, Ontario NFU Locals and NFU members are continuing to research and discuss the implications, including health impacts, of the Green Energy Act and the production and distribution of renewable energy on farmers and rural communities. This research and discussion is likely to lead to additional policies and position statements from the NFU on the production and distribution of renewable energy in Ontario.

National Farmers Union

5420 Hwy #6 North, R.R. #5 Guelph, Ontario N1H 6J2

1-888-832-9638

www.nfuontario.ca