

# Farmland Ownership and Wind Energy

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With a few searches online, it is easy to get a taste of the contentious issue of wind turbines. But in recent years, wind energy has become the lowest cost source of new electricity – even without tax incentives. And the additional income source from wind easements can be significant for landowners. Where is the divide?

With findings cited by the Iowa Environmental Council, the benefits of wind energy add up on the local level:

- **Lease or easement payments to landowners.** By 2020, it is estimated that landowners will receive more than \$43 million dollars in payments.
- **Property tax revenue to counties.** In counties that have had significant wind development, property tax revenue from wind projects is one of the largest sources of such revenue.
- **Clean energy resources.** Unlike fossil fuel-fired power plants, wind turbines do not produce air pollutants, nor do they use water or produce water pollution in the process of generating electricity.
- **Local economic development.** In 2016, Iowa had between 8,000 and 9,000 jobs supported by the wind industry. Iowa's wind development has also attracted significant employment in wind manufacturing and businesses in the wind supply chain to communities across the state. Iowa's supply of low-cost wind energy also attracts companies with renewable energy goals to locate new facilities or expand operations in Iowa.

Iowa has more wind in our electricity mix than any other state in the U.S. with 37% of our generation coming from wind. We are third nationally in overall wind capacity and our wind fleet will grow from the current 7,312 MW to 10,000 MW by 2020. This presents a major opportunity for Iowa landowners.

But while those are positive statistics, some are raising reservations and objections to wind turbine projects.

- **Aesthetic change to the landscape.** Drive across some parts of the state, it is no longer just farm fields for as far as the eye can see.
- **Sound and shadow flicker.** Some neighbors to turbines have reported a low humming from the motor as well as a shadow flicker due to the movement of turbine blades between the sun and property. Research has shown that annoyance related to such effects are strongly related to whether a person is compensated for these impacts.
- **Over subsidized.** Some question the fairness of subsidizing wind although all forms of energy production in the U.S. receive subsidies. Wind is Iowa-produced energy and replaces subsidized coal the state would import from Wyoming and Montana. The federal wind production tax credit is currently phasing out.
- **Health impacts to humans and animals.** There is concern with the industrial scale of turbines and questions about whether they can impact health. Scientific evidence does not support claims of negative health effects. To learn more about potential health impacts, Iowa Environmental Council has recently published “Wind Turbines and Health” and is available online [here](#).

A very real sentiment but more difficult to pinpoint is that these projects are perceived to be brokered by power companies and politicians not living in the local area. That there is an arm’s length transaction aspect that feeds into a rural versus urban divide.

What perhaps is lost in the pros and cons of wind energy, is that producing any kind of energy comes at a cost and will impact the environment and people. Wind turbines provide clean, renewable, homegrown energy that does not threaten our water or air and creates good-paying jobs and economic benefits in rural Iowa.

The Iowa Environmental Council has published “Successful County Wind Siting Practices in Iowa” that reviews county ordinance provisions for wind development. On the local level, addressing issues such as setbacks, decommissioning schedules, and infrastructure impact during construction can be addressed to protect landowners. Whether working in an official role or simply interested in learning more about the issues of clean energy infrastructure, this is a valuable resource and can be found online [here](#).

Peoples Company Land Managers are well versed in the pros and cons of wind turbines and can be a valuable resource for questioning landowners. If entering into a wind turbine contract is chosen, a Land Manager can be the consistent boots on the ground to monitor construction and ensure construction areas are returned to the original state post installation. To learn more about Peoples Company Land Management, please visit [www.peoplescompany.com](http://www.peoplescompany.com) or email [landmanagement@peoplescompany.com](mailto:landmanagement@peoplescompany.com).

The Iowa Environmental Council’s mission is a safe, healthy environment and sustainable future for Iowa through work in education, advocacy and coalition building. To learn more about the Iowa Environmental Council, please visit [www.iaenvironment.org](http://www.iaenvironment.org).

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