

Windy Elton wants turbines

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Co-operator staff

MINTO
Excitement generated by the wind energy project in St. Leon has prompted an R.M. of Elton resident to ask, "Why not here?"

Dan Mazier operates a mixed farm in the Justice area. He began to wonder if his blustery area had wind energy potential. With three large transmission lines running through the area from the Brandon generating station, it seemed to him the area was perfectly situated.

But developers approached St. Leon farmers to see if they were receptive to the idea. Mazier wanted to approach the developer. "In the fall of 2005, I contacted Manitoba Sustainable Energy Association and posed the question, 'How do I develop wind energy in my area?'"

Carl Cunningham and Laurence Lafond of ManSEA suggested he indicate his interest to Manitoba Hydro. He knew he would need his community on side to make the idea work.

The community met for the first time in February 2006 to assess whether the area supported wind turbine development. A co-operative, Elton Energy, was formed from that meeting and discussions continued in the following weeks.

Mazier learned some of the important concerns on people's minds. "The first thing they want to know is if they are getting a turbine. The second thing they want to know is how much they get paid," he said.

There were environmental concerns about bird safety, but



WIND WEARY: Dan Mazier (r) tours the Rourke farm ethanol plant. His own plan is to harness wind for energy.

Mazier said they learned that tomcats will kill more birds than wind turbines.

Mazier met with a developer in July that expressed an interest in the area.

After fact finding and information gathering, Mazier held another community meeting bringing in experts to address concerns. He even brought in a lawyer to talk about the contracts.

The co-op has since formalized its business structure and has set its sights on a 10-megawatt project it hopes will be part of 1,000 megawatts of power the Manitoba government has pledged to develop.

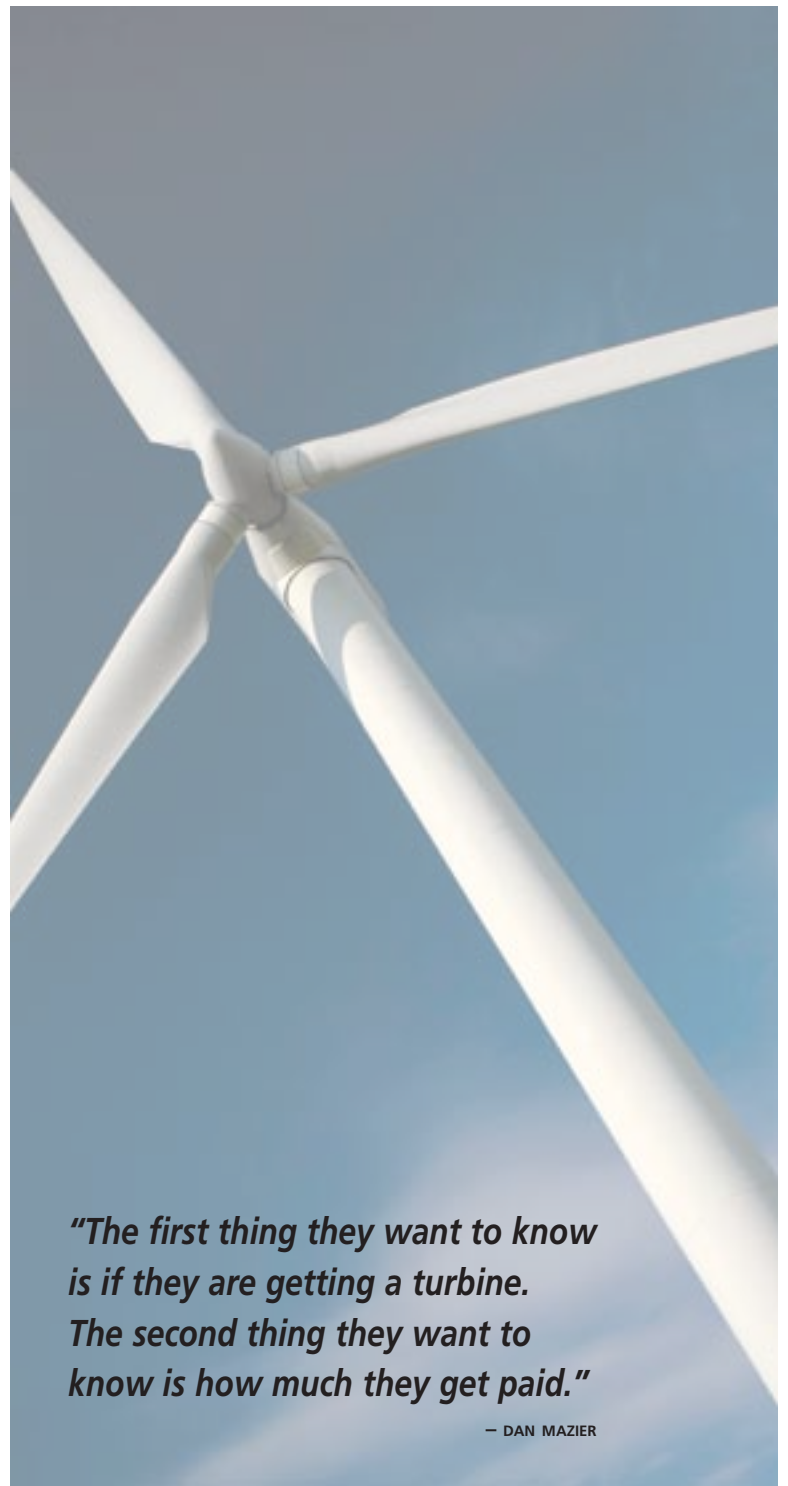
The project is still in its infancy, and the area has not yet been tested by a metering tower to see if it is in fact as windy as Mazier thinks.

Mazier said the co-op has considered purchasing its own metering tower to speed the assessment process. He feels that even if results show the wind in his area isn't significant, the co-op could rent the metering tower to other communities to test their own wind regime.

Mazier took the unusual approach of seeking technical support and web design from the local high school. He was pleased with the response. "They can really energize your project," he said.

Mazier said he's left with the feeling that everyone is a winner no matter what the outcome. Elton Energy is developing a web site and local youth are learning about wind energy.

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— DAN MAZIER



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