

Maine's Farm Energy Partners Network The Power of Collaboration

Taking Initiative

Recognizing the challenge and opportunity presented by rapidly rising energy costs, Maine Rural Partners, led by Ron Desrosiers of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), invited public and private sector organizations to a meeting in June 2006 to discuss coordination of strategies to assist the agricultural community in achieving energy efficiencies and moving into the renewable energy field for on-farm use and/or export. The response was enthusiastic and the Farm Energy Partners Network (FEPN or Network) was formed to improve coordination among service providers and position Maine agriculture to take maximum advantage of federal and state programs to become a national leader in this arena.

Securing Resources

The FEPN immediately began strengthening coordination among the many organizations interested in energy conservation, renewable energy development and farm profitability. However, additional resources needed to be obtained to build Network capacity and expand the coordination of service delivery. Thankfully, three grant initiatives taken by Network partners were successful in 2007 and are enabling significant forward movement as we enter 2008. The Androscoggin Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, supported by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and a NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant, is building the foundation for Maine's farms to participate in the carbon trading market.

Strengthening Delivery Systems

Two major USDA grants are supporting a team approach to strengthen the Energy Audit Program of Efficiency Maine as it serves farm businesses. Agricultural outreach partners who work closely with Maine's farmers on a regular basis are teaming with the Efficiency Maine Energy Auditors and Business Program Field Staff to deliver top-notch energy efficiency advice to Maine's farmers in collaboration. Efficiency Maine staff have enthusiastically risen to this challenge and we are very excited about the opportunity before us. This team approach is being launched on January 14, 2008 during an intensive training program entitled "Farm Energy Audit Training for Field Advisors: Structures and Fixed Machinery," where this Field Guide is being distributed.

Following this training and with the use of this Field Guide for reference, an intensive audit outreach program will be conducted on Kennebec County dairy farms organized by the Kennebec County Soil and Water Conservation District (KCSWCD). This work is made possible by a Conservation Innovation Grant of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and will provide additional incentive funds to match with Efficiency Maine resources on energy efficiency investments. Both the process and energy savings resulting from investments made will be documented and distributed as a pilot effort.

With the support of an outreach grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency to Maine Rural Partners, FEPN outreach partners will conduct workshops, additional farm audits, on-farm demonstrations and grant application assistance. These efforts will especially target beginning and limited resource farmers who wish to strengthen their businesses.

Documenting and Sharing what We Learn

Sharing our experiences is how we best learn and move forward. FEPN members from both the public and private sectors are committed to advancing farm-based energy efficiency and renewable energy as a community, with due respect for the competitive private marketplace. We hope this ***Farm Energy Field Guide*** will further promote the power of collaboration.