

## Groundbreaking Held at Laredo Ridge Wind Farm



Wind towers continue to rise from the Nebraska plains. With Gov. Dave Heineman and about 100 others on hand for the official groundbreaking ceremony held July 21 in Petersburg, excavations and site work have already begun on the state's next large wind farm.

The 81-megawatt wind facility is being developed by Chicago-based Midwest Wind Energy, LLC, on a high ridge running three miles northeast of the Boone County community. An affiliate of Edison Mission Group (EMG) of Irvine, Calif., Laredo Ridge Wind, LLC, will consist of 54 GE turbines, meeting the electricity needs of about 26,000 homes when completed later this year.

"The tremendous turnout at the groundbreaking ceremony is a testimony of how excited the community and the whole area are," says District 41 State Sen. Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids. "It's going to mean a lot. It is green energy and brings new jobs. I think there will be a ripple effect with more wind farms in the whole area and spin-off businesses as well."

Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), EMG and Laredo Ridge Wind, LLC, entered into a 20-year power purchase agreement in February. Under that agreement, Laredo Ridge Wind, LLC, will own and operate the facility and NPPD will purchase the electric output. The arrangements are similar to those made in the 27-turbine Elkhorn Ridge Wind Farm north of Bloomfield that became operational in 2009.

The \$200 million Laredo Ridge project is expected to support about 170 construction jobs and will pay nearly \$6 million in taxes and fees to the local and state economies over the next 20 years, according to a news release from EMG.

"Laredo Ridge would not have been possible without the leadership of NPPD and the support of our participating landowners," Midwest Wind's executive vice-president, Mike Donahue said in the news release. "This is an example of how public power, private developers and the local community can work together to create a win-win situation for renewable energy and economic development."

These same parties are currently negotiating for the proposed Broken Bow wind farm project expected to become operational in 2012. The projects, along with others being planned, are part of a strategic plan by NPPD to obtain 10% of its energy from renewable energy sources by 2020.

"Polls taken since 1994 have shown that 90%-plus of Nebraskans support our public powered system finding a way forward for renewable energy," says John Hansen, Nebraska Farmers Union president. "We're continuing to go through the process and wind energy is gaining steam."

For more information on wind project development in the state, read the September issue of Nebraska Farmer.