



Power, from the ground up



By Michael Heinz/Journal & Courier

Bob Suiter Jr. stands Monday in an area on one of his farm plots near Earl Park that will have a wind turbine. He expects his arrangement with Orion Energy Group to be lucrative. "I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't think so," he said.

Benton County landscape changes slowly as wind farms take root

By DAN SHAW

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Some Benton County farmers have cut down part of their crops to make way for the wind turbines a company is building on their land.

Bob Suiter Jr. said Orion Energy Group is erecting three of the turbines, which generate electricity, on two pieces of land where he farms corn and soybeans in northwest Benton County. The turbines take up about a third of an acre, and the company is compensating Suiter for the crops it removes.

"It didn't make any difference whether it was harvested or not," he said. "They still go in and do it."

Turner Hunt, an Orion project manager, said Orion plans to build 87 wind turbines in what it is calling the

Benton Wind Farm. The company is undertaking preliminary work on the sites — setting concrete foundations for the turbines, building roads to them and running electrical cables there.

The construction began in late July. Orion plans to start selling electricity from the wind farm in May, he said.

The company is leasing the sites on which the turbines will stand from about 100 landowners, Hunt said. The landowners can expect to make from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year from the agreements, according to Orion.

Suiter said he receives a flat fee for renting his land. Any payments beyond that will be proportionate to the amount of power generated by the

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turbines. He expects the lease to be lucrative.

"I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't think so," he said.

Duke Energy, one of the largest electric companies in the United States, has agreed to buy up to 100 megawatts of the 130 megawatts the Benton Wind Farm can generate at any given time.

Hunt said other companies want to purchase power from the wind farm, but he declined to name them.

Orion is not the only company that plans to have turbines in Benton County. BP Alternative Energy of Houston is looking at building Fowler Ridge Wind Farm in several townships in the county. The company has agreed to sell up to 200 megawatts of electricity from those turbines to subsidiaries of American Electric Power of Columbus, Ohio.

And enXcoof North Palm Springs, Calif., announced plans in January 2004 to build

Wind power

Turbines for the Benton Wind Farm are planned for York and Richland townships in Benton County.



a wind farm named "Indiana Winds" in Benton County. Hunt said Orion studied the winds in several nearby counties before it decided to build the turbines in Benton County, which it has been working in for four years.

He declined to comment about whether Orion is looking at building a wind farm in Tippecanoe County.

By the numbers

Electricity: The 87 turbines in the Benton Wind Farm can generate up to 130 megawatts of electricity at a time, although the average output will be a third of that.

Height: The turbine towers are about 265 feet high from base to hub.

Size: The diameter of the rotor blades is 270 feet.

Not too close: Each turbine will take up about a third of an acre and will stand about a quarter mile away from the others.

35 square miles: The entire farm will be contained in an area 7 miles wide and 5 miles long.