



Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center - Farmamerica

Telling the Story of Agriculture

September 27, 2013

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
Saint Paul, MN 55101-2147
Sent via email to PublicComments.PUC@state.mn.us

PUC Docket Number: E002-M-12-1278

Attn: Dr. Burl Haar, Executive Secretary

Re: Public Comments – In support of Farmamerica: Combined Solar, Wind and Battery for Energy Self-Sufficiency Project (EP4-21)

Dear Dr. Haar:

Thanks for encouraging public comment on the RDF proposals, reviews and recommendations. Like all other organizations with lower scores, we have been looking for areas in which we believe there may be some reason to improve the position of our project proposal. Here are some areas in which we think 1) scoring may have been flawed and 2) attention to the stated goals of the project may have been overlooked.

As an overall observation, of the 15 projects recommended for funding, 11 are in the 7 county metro area and only two are recommended for non-profit organizations. We do hope the scorers and evaluators did understand that the Farmamerica proposal is for a rural project and that the organization is a non-profit.

Comments were made about the incompleteness of technical specifications for elements of the project we proposed. We would draw your attention to the commitment to use competitive bidding with specifications that can be validated for highly reliable existing commercial components (batteries, etc.). We intentionally did not specify a brand or manufacturer. In addition, we did feel that the Farmamerica proposal did not receive credit in the point scoring for use of a battery bank and its value in contributing to lowering the peak utility loads in the area.

In comparison with other solar project proposals, we did include the use of tracking and fixed array solar panels. Because we do have sufficient acreage for a ground-mounted system, we believe that the data logging and production differences will be one of the interesting features of the system that we would like to make available as a part of the education-related programming we plan for the general public.

It should be noted that we did acknowledge our intention to work with regional technical and community colleges (specifically we mentioned Riverland College) and students involved in their renewable energy and electrician programs. Farmamerica is an educational venue that has been established by the Minnesota Legislature as a public-private

partnership and to interpret agriculture and rural life's past, present and future. K-12 education is very much a partner in many of the things we do at Farmamerica.

Energy has long been a focus and its evolution of source and delivery systems has made it possible for rural areas to become productive engines of the Minnesota economy. So, while we did not, in fact were led to believe that education was not a goal of the RDF, it certainly is one of goals and combined with the displacement of the electrical energy costs to operate our facilities through on-site generation, makes perfect sense as both economic and educational outcomes for the project.

The combined solar, wind and battery combined renewable energy system will provide students opportunities (within the time frame in the design and installation calendar) to become engaged during the initial construction year. Other students and future installers throughout the South Central, South East and South West regions of the will have the benefit of observing a commercial scale project of much like they will have the opportunity to design, build and maintain themselves.

We believe there is demonstrated demand for electricity from combined systems. Distributed power generation in rural areas and rural communities does make sense. We are painfully aware of the resistance to renewable energy technologies of these kinds in the counties in the region. We believe a project of this kind can be a door opener to distributed rural power generation in these kinds of areas in the state.

The Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center-Farmamerica was established in 1978 and is governed by a 15 member elected Board of Directors with three year overlapping terms. The organizations staying power and continued presence in the region is as significant as its statewide mission and potential.

Thanks for taking another look at the Farmamerica Proposal.

Warm Regards,



James L. Gibson
Executive Director