

KS Farm Bureau Weighs In On Transmission Line **Is the answer blowing in the wind?**

By John Schlageck, Kansas Farm Bureau

With each passing day there's more interest in the Grain Belt Express Clean Line transmission project. This is the proposed direct current (DC) electric transmission line that would run from near Spearville north and east across the state to the Kansas-Missouri border.

Thousands of farmers and ranchers who live and work along the proposed route of this project may need to alter their practices if the line is built across their property.

Like other Kansans, farmers and ranchers understand the importance of developing our state's wind resources. They also realize that in order to maximize the potential for wind development, transmission lines are necessary to move power to population centers across the state and the nation.

If Grain Belt is successful in building this transmission line, nearly 1,000 more wind towers could go online in southwestern Kansas. This could result in an economic boom for a part of the state that is reeling from extended drought and the impact of the declining Ogallala Aquifer on the grain and feedlot industries.

Utilities building transmission lines in Kansas should look at options that minimize the impact on landowners and create positive long-term relationships between agriculture and industry.

Compensation should be paid annually and based on the fair market value of the property impacted by transmission line easements or restrictions, says Mike Irvin, Kansas Farm Bureau legislative counsel. If lines impact farm or ranching operations or requires alteration of facilities, those expenses should be included in any compensation package.

"Sittings should be located along section of property lines," Irvin says. "Landowners may be able to maximize the potential of their land and minimize logistical inconvenience – even if a line is built on their property."

Developers must restore damage to grasslands and compensate for crop damage resulting from activity associated with the building, maintenance and operation of the line.

"Transmission line easements often try to shift or place liability for any unintended or inadvertent damage to structures to the landowner," Irvin says. "The KCC should require developers to assume and manage that risk."

Transmission lines have the potential to interfere with modern agricultural technologies that is expensive and provides necessary, valuable data to farmers and ranchers about their production practices.

"We strongly suggest that before the KCC approves any transmission line routes in Kansas, that studies be conducted to show potential impacts and efforts be made by developers to minimize interference to landowners, their property and operations."

Are there other unknown and possible unintended consequences?

Consider the following: there has been no discussion of the impact or location of generator lead lines that will connect wind towers with the conversion station. There are no restrictions to prevent other power generation companies from accessing the line or to prevent power produced outside of Kansas from connecting with the project.

All Kansas citizens, landowners and businesses deserve a thorough examination of these issues before final approval is given. The Kansas Corporation Commission will conduct an evidentiary hearing, open to the public, concerning the proposed Clean Line project.

The hearing is slated for 9 a.m., Oct. 8-10 in the first floor hearing room at the Kansas Corporation Commission Topeka office, 1500 S.W. Arrowhead Road.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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