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It All Comes Down to 'Control'

By Joe Gwerder
Special to the Rancher

My grandfather operated a modest dairy of 80 cows and my father had a ranch consisting of approximately 150 head of beef cattle. I myself spent the majority of my 20's working with alfalfa, dry land grain, almonds, and walnuts. Now at age 50 I have centered a large portion of my business on helping the Farmer and Rancher gain some control over their electrical costs. For the past few years the majority of attention has been on oil prices. It's no secret that fuel costs have a huge impact on the profit and loss outcome in the Ag industry. Unfortunately, for the individual there is very little, if any control over these costs. These decisions happen at the political level. The electrical energy world (Grid Power) brings with it a lot of the same characteristics. It's alarming to understand the lack of control or personal choices we have with our electricity. If you really break it down to the simplest terms, the only individual choice we have is how much we use. Even our quantity is controlled by the nature of our business and what it takes to operate it.

When it comes to choosing a utility provider you are forced to connect to the "wires" adjacent to your property. There-

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fore, you do not actually have a choice. So, what can we do to gain back our individual control over our electricity costs? The way I see it we have three choices. One, use less. As already mentioned this could be very difficult without adversely affecting your business. Two, give our electrical loads (motors) a tune up. There are very exciting new technologies to do just this. It is absolutely possible that many of your electrical motors could operate more efficiently. Just as an engine will use less fuel when properly tuned, so will an electric motor use less current when the correct equipment is applied in conjunction. Three, make your own electricity. There are several avenues that can be taken to achieve this such as Solar Power, Wind Generation, D.C Water Pumps, Hydro Power etc. All of these are great options if your location and requirements are conducive to their type of operation.

There remain some incorrect stereotypes toward alternative energy products. The two I hear most often are: "Solar

the previous one, it is not logical to think of electricity as a luxury at any level. To do so would be going backwards. So assuming then we all "need" it and have basically no control over our utility company and their rates, it seems we should at least want to choose how we can control our bottom line costs.

I would like to also address the environmental effects we will have in using more alternative sources. So far this entire article has focused on the costs of electricity. I want to be clear that I am completely aware of the positive effects this concept has on our environment. I truly believe we can do what's right for our planet and our pocket books at the same time.

There is a lot of talk these days about "Green." As a society we are focusing now more than ever on the environment. The Ag community has a large interest in this whole new way of thinking. The entire way of life of a Farmer or Rancher is based on the condition of the land, the water and environmental conditions that can affect the weather.

I'm not going to throw out a bunch of statistics here. In my opinion there is no loser. Farmers and Ranchers clean-up and/or produce some or all of their own electricity. It makes very good business sense and it's the right thing to do for the environment.

Power is great but it takes too long to see the return on my investment." "Wind Turbines would work well at my location but they're ugly, noisy, and kill birds." The confines of space restrict me from going into much detail here, but I will say this. Concerning Solar Energy, technology has greatly increased and costs have moderately reduced. It is very common now to see total investment returns in 5-12 years. The "payback" time frame is usually much quicker than the components warranties. With regards to the Wind Turbines there is a new breed of "Vertical" machine now that you will be pleasantly surprised by. I think it is vital to look at each situation with an open mind. Every set of circumstances should be analyzed based on its particular needs so the best option is applied. In many cases a combination of steps is best.

Electricity is caught somewhere between a luxury and a necessity depending on how you use it. With the concept that each generation should do better than