



Reduce Energy Costs and Consumption

As you turn up the thermostat during cold weather, think twice—take steps to save money and the earth.

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Implement ways to reduce energy around your farm home this winter, such as sealing drafts around doors and windows. If after a couple months of harsh winter weather you took a look at your electric bill and thought, “Yikes!” then start thinking about how you use your energy. Cold weather might make your energy consumption soar through the roof, but it’s not too late to take energy-saving action.

According to the Edison Electric Institute, small farmers can take steps to reduce their energy consumption, including conducting an energy audit, applying for tax incentives, and making small changes around the home and farm.

Energy Audits

An energy audit is an evaluation made by an electric utility company that shows how much energy you use and how to reduce your energy consumption or energy cost.

Performing an energy audit on your house is a simple process. The auditor will note opportunities and problems regarding energy conservation measures (ECMs) and operation and maintenance measures (O&Ms) and take photos. You will then receive a report with information about your monthly energy consumption and a list of ECMs and O&Ms.

“The easy part is getting the audit, but the hard part is making the recommended changes. Most people don’t follow through and get the work done,” says Keith Voight, a spokesperson for EEI.

However, there are things to keep in mind if you want an energy audit performed on your farm, according to the National Center for Appropriate Technology. Because energy audits only assess electricity usage, they will not take into account the cost of propane, diesel fuel and natural gas. If you have a larger farm, the cost of the audit might be higher than your energy or cost savings, and you might want to consider energy reliability over cost. You also may need an auditor with specialized training in your area of agriculture if, for example, your farm has a greenhouse or you raise chickens.

“Note that every utility is offering different programs and services, so it is not possible to give you a single answer as to what [you] will get from [your] utility,” Voight says. “But every utility has information on energy efficiency, and many have programs with financial assistance.”

Energy Tax Incentives

The U.S. Department of Energy offers tax incentives for both home energy efficiency and renewable energy. Through these programs, you can receive tax credits on 30 percent of improvement or technology costs.

Energy Efficiency for Existing Homes: Homeowners can receive up to \$1,500 on improvements for roofing, windows, installation, and heating and cooling equipment. Changes must be implemented by Dec. 31, 2010.

Renewable Energy for Existing or New Homes: Homeowners can receive assistance with renewable energy technologies such as geothermal heat pumps, photovoltaic systems, solar water heaters and small wind energy systems. There is no limit on how much you can receive. Installations must take place by Dec. 31, 2016.

In addition, the USDE offers tax credits on new homes and automobiles. You can also check to see what your state or utility offers.

Small Ways to Conserve Energy

While thinking about bigger ways to reduce your farm’s energy consumption, there are things you can start doing today to make your energy impact a little lighter. Try some of these tips offered by the EEI to reduce your annual energy use:

- Turn down the thermostat a couple degrees.
- Clean or replace your air conditioner and furnace filter.
- Keep the water heater temperature no higher than 120 degrees F.
- Caulk and weather-strip around windows and doors.
- Use compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- Wash and dry full loads of clothes.