

Clean Energy Reality Check Series, Article No. 1

Clean energy in Georgia

The present distance between expectation and reality

Georgians are by nature conservationists. We separate our recyclables, volunteer for trash cleanups in our communities and teach our children to turn off the lights when they leave the room, and not to leave a faucet to drip.

This culture of conservation is also being applied to energy sources that provide power to our homes, businesses and communities. Ten years ago, Georgia's electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) joined together to form Green Power EMC, the largest voluntary green power program in the state, accounting for approximately 152 million kilowatt-hours of green power from Georgia-based renewable resources. Energy-efficiency, conservation and demand-side management programs represent another vital clean energy sector, and through energy audits and other conservation and efficiency programs, Georgia's EMC consumers conserved enough energy to power more than 3,100 homes in 2009 alone.

Despite these extraordinary efforts, some well-intentioned, but uninformed activists would lead Georgians to believe that supplying power to our homes and businesses with purely renewable power sources is going to be cheap—and even easy.

It sounds good to argue that we should shift our power supply to environmentally friendly and renewable energy sources such as sun, wind, water, wood chips, and even chicken and livestock waste. And hardly a week goes by when these types of projects aren't being reviewed by EMC power supply planners. Proponents claim that these power sources are 100-percent natural and in ready

supply in Georgia. And even some in Congress are pushing to pass legislation that would establish a renewable electricity standard (RES), requiring utilities to derive 15 percent of their power from renewable sources or energy-efficiency savings by the year 2021, or face significant penalties.

The goal of getting 15 percent of our energy from renewable sources or energy efficiency is laudable, but we cannot ignore some harsh realities.

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Georgians do care about the environment, and we care about conservation. At the same time, Georgia farmers, small business owners, manufacturers and especially our families need and expect reliability and affordability in electricity service. That's a reality.

EMCs are forging ahead with green power in Georgia, teaching in our communities how to conserve and take advantage of renewable energy sources. But it is also our fiduciary responsibility to educate our members on the realities of the geographic and financial challenges facing Georgia and the entire Southeast in securing a significant percentage of renewable and "green" sources for our power.

Now is the time to address the



To learn more about green power in Georgia, visit Green Power EMC's website at www.greenpoweremc.com.

present distance between expectation and reality on the subject of increasing Georgia's renewable energy portfolio.

To do so, articles in the Clean Energy Reality Check series will answer questions and address some prevalent myths on the topic of renewables. What exactly is a "renewable" energy source? Which renewable sources are viable in our state, based on our climate, resources and demand? What are consumers' personal options and "pocketbook consequences" for purchasing electricity generated by these sources? What can consumers do to manage their own energy use more wisely, thereby contributing to stewardship of Georgia's energy resources?

This Clean Energy Reality Check series will appear in *GEORGIA Magazine* for the next several issues, to dissect the subject of clean energy in Georgia. Beginning in February 2011, each Clean Energy Reality Check will focus on one or more of the following topics—including solar, wind, hydropower/geothermal, biomass, nuclear, energy efficiency, demand-side management and conservation. We will examine the pros, cons, viability and roadblocks to each, as we search for clean, reliable and affordable power to fuel our busy state.