



How GoMacro brought 100% renewable energy to its entire home community

With the help of an organic brand, a small rural town embraced big changes for the benefit of the environment.



This summer, GoMacro announced a milestone for its green energy program: Beginning with the August 2020 billing cycle, all residences, business and schools in its headquarter town of Viola, Wisconsin,

will run on 100% renewable wind energy. In partnership with local energy utilities, the organic brand is covering the additional costs of purchasing renewable energy credits for the entire municipality, effectively subsidizing all Viola residents' use of green energy.

Though the company has been utilizing 100% renewable energy to power its production facility since December 2018, this effort extends the company's values beyond its walls to make wind power available to everyone in town.

Here, Director of Operations Tony Saarem explains how company values can influence an entire community.

Why was it important that GoMacro prioritize green energy overall?

Right from the start, our founders made sustainability a priority and a vital part of our mission. We believe businesses and individuals alike have a responsibility to the planet, and we consider the environmental impacts of everything from our ingredient sourcing to our shipping to the way we power our facility. As our business has grown, so has our opportunity to positively impact the environment

and lead the way for other companies within our industry.

Naturally, using green energy is a big part of how we live out our values as a company. Conventional electricity generation is the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the US, so it's a place where we saw an opportunity to make a significant impact by switching to 100% renewable energy and working with suppliers who do the same whenever possible. Once we achieved that goal, we wanted to extend the power of renewable wind energy to the rest of the community that GoMacro calls home.

How did you decide on wind energy as an avenue for this project, as opposed to solar or other green options?

When we expanded our manufacturing facility in 2017, we had the opportunity to add 844 solar panels to its roof in Viola, Wisconsin. Our solar array provides around 40% of our total energy use. However, the midwest isn't exactly known for intense, year-round sunshine, so we had to seek out other renewable options to fulfill the rest of our energy needs.

We worked with our local utility and found that our best option was to purchase wind renewable energy credits (RECs) from local and regional wind farms. Once we had the processes to make 100% renewable energy a reality, we had the idea for GoMacro to cover the additional costs of purchasing RECs for the entire municipality, effectively subsidizing all Viola residents' use of renewable energy.

What did you need to do to partner with local utilities to transition traditional energy sources into wind power for the community? What can brands who want to do something similar expect?

Viola is a small, rural community, so GoMacro is responsible for a significant amount of its energy usage. We opened up a broader conversation with the Viola Municipal Electric Utility in 2017 when we began planning for solar panels and buying wind RECs. The wind REC agreement was crafted cooperatively between GoMacro and our local electric utility. Still, the program was ultimately dependent on the approval of the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, which regulates all electric utilities in the state.

When we brought up the idea of subsidizing renewable energy for the entire municipality, our local partners were very excited. In addition to the Viola Municipal Electric Utility, we also worked with a green energy consultant and our attorneys who helped iron out the tariff's legalities and details. Then the tariff went to the state Public Service Commission for approval.

The details will vary based on local laws and utilities, but the first step for brands looking to implement a similar program is to reach out to your local utility company and connect with the right people in your local and state government.

What lessons did you learn along the way? What do you wish you knew when you started?

Sometimes creative solutions begin with a simple conversation. We had this unconventional idea to cover the additional cost of green energy for our neighbors, and sometimes you have to ask if something can be done to start the ball rolling. Despite the small town we're located in, our partners were capable of big thinking and significant innovation. There was genuine enthusiasm from our local partners to make this happen, which kept

everyone motivated to push the program ahead.

Our path was a bit more complicated because an agreement like this hadn't been done before. I think there was some uneasiness from state regulators at first, simply because the notion of supplying green power to our neighbors was new. But now that the groundwork is in place, it will be a much simpler process each time a future program like this is established in Wisconsin.

What have you been able to achieve with this program?

First and foremost, we're proud and excited to bring 100% renewable energy to our facility and our entire town. We love being part of this community, and it's not every day that a rural village of this size has access to 100% green energy. By achieving this, we also became part of the EPA Green Power Partnership, and are currently working with the EPA to get our community certified as well. It's more important than ever for businesses to lead the way in finding innovative ways to combat climate change, and we hope that this project can inspire other companies to look at how they can work with their local communities to make positive changes.

Where do you go from here?

We'll continue to power our facility with 100% renewable energy as we grow our business. We're also focused on finding ways to continue reducing our waste output as a company. In 2019, we reached 79% waste-free, but our goal is to eliminate and divert at least 90% of our waste from landfills to qualify for Zero Waste Certification. Our team is always looking for new ways to minimize our environmental impact and positively affect the planet.