

Are You Considering Solar?



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

THE IDEA OF GENERATING YOUR OWN ELECTRIC POWER with a personal renewable energy system is appealing to many, and in our area of the country, small solar photovoltaic systems are the most popular choices. Investing in your own generation, even on a small scale, is a big decision that deserves careful thought.

Do research and know the facts before buying one of these systems. Consider your location. Location is everything when it comes to the actual production of these renewable systems. If you're installing a solar PV system, make sure it is in an area completely free of shade at all hours of the day. This will maximize the output levels.

Get all the details from the salesperson in writing and don't depend on him or her as your sole source of information. Experts advise ignoring peak output numbers provided by vendors, as they are generally based on ideal situations that rarely exist.

Find out the total installed cost of the system—parts, installation and interconnection—and the amount of maintenance required before you make a purchase. If the system has a war-

ranty, be sure you know what it covers and what it doesn't cover. You want one that covers parts and labor. Don't hesitate to ask for names and contact information for individuals in your area who have purchased similar systems from the same vendor. Ask them about performance and reliability.

Know the rules your cooperative has for distributed generation systems, and don't depend on the salesperson to provide those rules or any buy-back rates to you. Currently, CECA does not purchase excess production but will credit the member account back to zero at retail rates. A copy of the CECA distributed generation policy is available upon request.

Because certain safety and metering protocols must be in place before any interconnection, it is imperative that the cooperative be made aware of the DG system. But it is also a good idea to have cooperative staff involved so they can provide you with unbiased information. CECA's Member Services Department employs qualified staff who specialize in helping members who are installing DG systems; use the expertise they have developed over the years to your advantage. We are committed to providing you the best answers and to becoming your "one-stop shop" for all things power-related.



Our staff has worked with members to install these systems and can provide you with advice on this big decision. If you are considering installing a personal renewable system, call CECA at 1-800-915-2533, email us at memberservices@ceca.coop or stop by our Comanche office at 201 W. Wrights Ave.

Last Call for Recipes!



We Want Your Recipes!

FOR OUR
CECA MEMBER COOKBOOK
VOLUME II

We are convinced that our CECA members are some of the best cooks out there! So why not prove it? Submit your recipes for our *CECA Member Cookbook, Volume II*.

Just email your recipe to sdukes@ceca.coop, or mail it to CECA, Attn: Shirley Dukes, P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442, and we will share the deliciousness. Be sure to include your name and the town or community in which you live so that we can recognize your greatness!

If the recipe is your own creation, handed down in your family or from a friend, we'd love to tell that story. Be sure to include it with your recipe submission. If it's just from a favorite cookbook, that's OK, too—tell us why you love this recipe.

Member submitting a recipe will receive a free copy of the cookbook to keep in their kitchen library.

So get those recipes headed this way, and let's all enjoy the fun!



P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442

Operating in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties

HEADQUARTERS

201 W. Wrights Ave.
Comanche, TX 76442

EARLY OFFICE

1801 CR 338
Early, TX 76801

EASTLAND OFFICE

1311 W. Main St.
Eastland, TX 76448

OFFICE HOURS

Comanche Office: Monday–Friday
7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Early Office: Monday, Wednesday
and Friday 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., closed
1–2 p.m.

Eastland Office: Tuesday and
Thursday 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

General Manager

Alan Lesley

Board of Directors

Randy Denning, District 1
Pete McDougal, District 2
Ruby Solomon, District 3
Monty Carlisle, District 4
Troy Stewart, District 5
Loren Stroebel, District 6
Phil Taylor, District 7

Report an Outage

CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue by calling 1-800-915-2533.

Contact Us

CALL US

1-800-915-2533 toll-free

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Solar-Powered Treehouse, Wildebeest, Elk and Camels, OH MY! Sustainability at Its Best

BY SHIRLEY KIDD DUKES



***sustainable**—adjective*

a: of, relating to or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged

b: of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods

—Merriam-Webster

DONNIE WILSON SPENT HIS CHILDHOOD in Hobbs, New Mexico. As a freshman in high school, his family moved to Brownfield, Texas, where they owned and operated a successful industrial herbicide business. As is common, Donnie was involved in that business from a young age, working through his high school years. At his graduation, his parents made plans to ship him off to Andrews to begin his career in the family business.

Tammie was raised on a cotton farm on the outskirts of Brownfield, where she spent summers and evenings alongside her brothers, moving irrigation pipe and helping with chores on the farm. The only daughter of strict parents, she led a protected and sheltered life.

Tammie was two years younger than him, but Donnie knew from the moment he met her that she was the one. They began dating when he was a junior and she was a freshman. After only a few months of dating, Donnie expressed his desire to marry her and spend the rest of their lives together. So a few years later, when his parents told him it was time to pack up his belongings and move away from Brownfield, he and Tammie balked at the idea of being separated. After much pleading, cajoling and sweet-talking, Tammie, at the tender age of 16 and a junior in high school, married her high school sweetheart, and they drove bravely into the unknown to begin a life together.

Forty years later, they are still happily married sweethearts

with an eventful and successful history. Most of those years were spent raising their three children and building not one but three successful businesses: their industrial herbicide business, the Hook and Anchor Boat Shop, and now their Rafter 5 cattle and exotic ranch. Today, semiretired, the Wilsons live their lives peacefully, surrounded by nature's beauty atop a hill in Brown County.

The Property

The Wilsons' ranch endeavor began in 1990 when they purchased property in Comanche County. Having grown up on a farm, Tammie loved being in the country, and they both loved horses and the ranch life. Though they never actually lived on the Comanche ranch, the entire family enjoyed spending time there. The kids loved exploring, tree climbing and swimming in creeks and ponds. Donnie and Tammie enjoyed the slower pace afforded by country life, away from the sandstorms of West Texas, where they were raising their children in Terry County on Tammie's grandparents' and parents' land. The trees and ponds of Comanche County, near Lake Proctor, were a far cry from the flatlands of West Texas.

In 2003, after much soul-searching and deliberation, the Wilsons sold their Comanche property to a client who loved it as much as they did and who found it to be a peaceful refuge after a devastating personal loss. The Wilsons then purchased the 2,400 acres in Brown County, where they continue to reside today.

"We enjoy being in the middle of nowhere," Tammie said. "People come and their first question is, 'How far are you from Walmart?'" But it usually doesn't take their guests long to figure out what the Wilsons love about the tranquility of the ranch.

In 2002, the Wilsons were able to semiretire. Their three children and their families have done what Donnie did as a young man: They have taken over their share of the business, leaving Donnie and Tammie time to do as they please while maintaining their interest in the business.

Their oldest daughter, Heather, and her husband, Layne Fields—along with their children, Madison, 16, and Brett, 14—manage the northern division in Weatherford. Rocky Wilson and his wife, Lexie—along with their children, Trevor, 14; Gavin, 11; and Maverick, 7—manage the western division in Brownfield. Their younger daughter, Jill, with her husband, Andrew Honnert, and children Ali, 7; Drew, 5; and Jolie, 4 months, manage the College Station area. The corporate office remains in Brownwood, and Donnie and Tammie continue to have a hand in running the business.

The ranch is a place where Donnie and Tammie, as well as their children, bring clients to unwind. "It is used as a 'get to know our clients' place,'" Tammie said. "They come to enjoy the peace and tranquility of God's beauty. In just minutes, you can feel the shift in their demeanor. They relax, and the stress of work subsides. This is when we get to know our new friends." Tammie says that getting people to come to the ranch is the easy part. "We have trouble getting them to go home!" she said laughingly. "We don't need to wine and dine you. You come here, we get to know you on a personal level. Some of them bring their kids. It's just a place to relax and chill."

In addition to being an oasis for the entire Wilson family and clients, the ranch has served as a place of healing for those who have had trials and struggles in their lives. The work and play of the place does something to lift spirits and cleanse souls. "Whether shooting from a gun or shooting from a camera, this time is always a great memory for all," Tammie said.

The Wilsons stay very busy and have little time for anything beyond their business, but they do offer the occasional paid hunts to recover some of the expenses of the exotics. In addition, they are always open to hosting members of the military. "They are overlooked and underappreciated," Donnie said.

The House and Treehouse

Donnie and Tammie live in a beautiful, sprawling home atop a hill, surrounded by nature, exotic wildlife and water. Not only

Left: The Wilson grandchildren on the front porch of the tree house, left to right, are: Drew Honnert, 5; Ali Honnert, 7; Maverick Wilson, 7; Maddison Fields, 16; Jolie Honnert, 4 months; Brett Fields, 14; Trevor Wilson, 14; and Gavin Wilson, 11.

Right: The entire Wilson clan by grouping, Brett Fields, Layne Fields, Heather Fields, Jill Honnert, Andrew Honnert, Madison Fields, Ali Honnert, Maverick Wilson, Tammie Wilson, Gavin Wilson, Donnie Wilson, Rocky Wilson, Lexie Wilson, Trevor Wilson and Drew Honnert.





Left: Meet Humphrey, right, and Sheba, the Rafter 5 camels. Having been raised on the ranch since being a baby, Humphrey is very friendly. After his first mate was killed, he came to the house and cried for hours. Eventually the Wilsons found Sheba, his second mate. She recently gave birth, and the pair are now the proud parents of a double-humped calf. Right: The ungainly gnu (pronounced “g-new” or simply “new”) earned the Afrikaans name wildebeest, or “wild beast,” for the menacing appearance presented by its large head, shaggy mane, pointed beard and sharp, curved horns. In fact, the wildebeest is better described as a reliable source of food for the truly menacing predators of the African savanna: lions, cheetahs, wild dogs and hyenas, according to *National Geographic*. Tammie said the first time her grandson saw one of the wildebeests, she had just finished warning him about snakes. He stopped in his tracks, looking at the strange creature, finger pointing steadily, and said slowly, “What. Is. That?”

is it their home, but it’s also a family retreat to be handed down to future generations.

In addition to their home, they also have a guest house with a rooftop solar display and a 3,200-gallon water cistern. They have moved both sets of their parents to the area in an effort to keep this family intact and have everyone close by.

Donnie and Tammie are close friends with the Goolsby brothers, who have done most of their building. In 2005, while in the process of building a basketball court for their grandchildren, Terry Goolsby asked Donnie, “What do you think about doing a treehouse?” He had been watching *Treehouse Masters* and wanted to try his hand at building one.

Donnie rolled his eyes at the idea, but Tammie gave the go-ahead, provided it was simple and not too large, requiring no water and no electricity. They did stay small with no water, but the treehouse since has been hooked up to the solar array, allowing the children to have some modern conveniences. The kids also like to pretend that it is a drive-in where they watch their favorite Disney movies.

Though it is not large, the treehouse hosts a ninja climbing wall, Batman pole, lookout tower and pirate ship, complete with inside benches and portholes for imaginative young minds. From the tower, one has a beautiful view of the entire property. It is also a nice place to sit and watch the animals on the ranch or the guests skeet-shooting. Sometime in the near future, it also will be home to a zip line.

The Wildlife

The wildlife situation on the ranch started when the Wilsons were still in Comanche. Donnie went to the Lampasas exotics sale looking for deer to stock the ranch. It was there that he fell in love with the exotic look of the animals and came home with camels, zebras and kangaroos. “During the drought, someone asked Donnie if he thought he was Noah getting ready for the flood with two of each animal!” Tammie said.

Unlike the local white-tailed deer, exotics hunting is a year-

round sport. It was originally a tool for entertaining clients but has evolved into more of a hobby and a way of life for them.

“We’re at the point where we get attached,” Tammie said. Gummy bears and fruit snacks are the deer’s favorite food, and some of them will eat from human hands. When it comes to feeding, the animals have a pecking order for who goes first to the feeders, and they respect each other’s territory. “We really like just sitting and watching them,” Tammie said.

Today the Wilsons have axis, black buck, sika, elk, red deer, fallow deer, gemsbok, oryx, wildebeest and turkey. “The big elk are what we enjoy watching the most,” Tammie said. “I made the mistake of putting the house in the middle of the high fence, and I go round and round with some of the fallow deer. At night, there may be 50 or more in my yard!”

The Wilsons are animal lovers and do not like the idea of having their animals confined in too small an area. Although they do have high game fences to keep the animals on the property, they allow them to roam the entire 2,400 acres, including the yards.

The grandchildren take great delight in watching the animals and have named a lot of them. The animals, in turn, enjoy the children—and will even come to the windows at night and watch the kids play in the house. Tammie says she spends many hours picking up the kids’ toys, not only because the kids leave them out, but because the deer and elk will come to the house and get the toys out to play with them. They enjoy playing with balls on the basketball court at night, knocking them back and forth. They do the same thing with Tammie’s lawn chairs, leading her to eventually resort to cheap plastic chairs that can easily be replaced.

Donnie and Tammie also believe in the old adage of “Waste not, want not.” “We work with the local game wardens, and they bring kids in from foster homes, and we’ll let them hunt,” Donnie said. Nothing is wasted, and any leftover meat not claimed by the hunters is carried to Lone Star Taxidermy and Processing in Owens, where it is processed and donated to the church, family, friends and those in need.

The Sustainability Factor

Sustainability was factored in during the early stage of the ranch's development. The water table in the area is poor because of the oil field bust in the 1930s. "Out here, in the middle of nowhere, we had nothing when we built the house. We had no electricity, no water—well, we had water, but it was horrible," Tammie said. "In fact, in eight months my faucets busted off because of the salt."

The poor water quality was the beginning of the sustainability efforts. Although they use the community water system for the house, the large amount of water needed for the wildlife, garden, yards and other vegetation led to the drilling of two wells on the river. The water is pumped to the ponds to water the animals and irrigate.

After the development of the water system, Donnie decided he wanted the ranch to become completely self-sufficient. After researching all the different aspects of wind and solar, they decided solar was the better option because of the battery storage capabilities. It is a clean source of energy, and Texas has an abundance of sunshine, so for the Wilsons, it was a no-brainer.

The average home consumes approximately 14,400 kilowatt-hours annually. Donnie's ground-mount solar array that serves the main house is a 37-kW unit capable of producing 73,112 kWh annually, enough to power five average-sized homes. The roof-mount system on the hunting lodge can produce up to 14,425 kWh, typical of an average-sized home.

Their current battery pack system stores 2,700 amp-hours of electricity, which is approximately 24 hours of storage. This system, without a supplemental power source and if used conservatively, could provide power for an extended time, provided the environment is right to recharge the batteries. A generator system is available as an alternative source of power in the event the solar system goes down for repairs, cloudy weather or for any other reason.

In addition to the sustainability of the power system, the ponds, water wells and cisterns for water storage assure the



The guest house features a 7-kilowatt solar array and a 3,200-gallon water cistern. However, with no backup battery storage, this location does not possess self-sustaining capabilities.

Wilsons an abundant supply of natural resources. For food sources, they have a garden and fruit trees, the river for fish, chickens for eggs and meat, cattle for beef and deer in abundance.

"The cost of living on every level will be dramatically increased by the time our grandkids take over the ranch," Tammie said. "Taking steps now to have the land, animals, food sources and energy taken care of will hopefully help them and others in the future. We love the land and its beauty. God has entrusted us with the care, and we take that very seriously. God's beauty cannot be done better by man, and we definitely don't want to spoil it! Being this far out has some disadvantages, but so worth it—even more when you can rely on yourself and not miss a beat. We hope to live here to our



The ranch's solar array is a 37-kilowatt unit capable of producing 73,112 kilowatt-hours annually, enough to power five average-sized homes.

death, if it be God's will, so having everything we need for every age and occurrence in life will help us do just that.

"We have always been aware of not polluting or abusing the land," Tammie said. "However, we did not really 'get it' on the sustainable issue until the last few years. Getting older and looking at the world through different eyes makes you realize what you have and want to save it for others. Knowing things can happen and our resources and energy could be shut off in times of emergency made us more conscious to be self-sufficient."

Although all this makes the ranch seem like it is totally off the grid, Donnie assures us they are not. The ranch still runs on CECA power but has the capability of operating independently

if the need ever arises. Because of the expense of the battery backup system, as well as the fact that the batteries only can be cycled through only a limited number of times, the Wilsons use the battery system only in emergency situations, relying on CECA power the majority of the time.

If you are interested in renewable energy, please contact CECA first and allow us to assist you with your energy needs. Certain protocols and safety measures must be in place before any alternative power source can be connected. CECA has professional staff available to assist you and ensure a stress-free power connection.

The Rafter 5 Ranch boasts a plethora of wildlife including axis, black buck, sika, elk, red deer, fallow deer, gemsbok, oryx, wildebeest and turkey.



Are you taking advantage of your FREE Healthy Savings Benefits?



As a member of CECA, you received a Co-op Connections card. Now the Co-op Connections program saves you even more! The CECA Co-op Connections card has saved members more than \$115,000 on prescriptions, dental, vision, hearing, lab and imaging services, and chiropractic work.

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