

BEHLEN IN THE NEWS

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Behlen eyes green projects

By Joe Ruff

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Behlen Mfg. Co. of Columbus, Neb., is pursuing business in renewable energy projects, including a recent contract with a German company to build metal frames for solar panels that track the sun's movement, officials said Tuesday.

"As a Nebraska manufacturing company, we see the opportunity to grow the business and create Nebraska jobs with renewable energy, whether it is geothermal, the sun or the wind," said Tony Raimondo Jr. of Behlen.

A+F GmbH, a division of the Gildemeister Group, makes the SunCarrier solar panels, which are housed in metal tracking units that move with the rising and setting sun, maximizing their ability to soak up solar energy that can be turned into electricity, Raimondo said.

Beginning next year, Behlen will make the metal framework for the panels for the North American market. Each unit could be worth about \$19,000 to Behlen, and many units would make up a single solar power plant, Raimondo

Behlen primarily builds metal gates and other equipment for livestock, grain storage facilities and other prefabricated metal buildings and hydraulic presses. But it also is bidding through its north Omaha division, Distefano Tool and Manufacturing, to produce parts for wind turbines made by Vestas of Denmark, which has plants in Colorado.

Behlen also is looking into possible marketing of small wind turbines and towers for ranch use, Raimondo said.

On the geothermal side, Behlen has a manufacturing license for technology that uses one well to pump water, run it through a heat exchanger to heat or cool buildings, and pump it back into the groundwater, Raimondo said. A unit is being tested by the Hershey (Neb.) Public Schools.

Wind energy, in particular, is getting increased attention in Nebraska this year as the Legislature studies the issue in hopes of introducing legislation that could expand the industry.