

PROFILE

ACCIONA WINDPOWER

By Russ Willcutt



With more than 15 years of experience in the global wind industry, this company is making a significant investment in the North American market as well.

AS PART OF A COMPANY founded more than 160 years ago, and today a leader in manufacturing cutting-edge turbines, ACCIONA Windpower is firmly rooted in the past with an eye trained toward the future. And with years of experience in the global wind industry, the company is sharing that expertise with the North-American market.

“We wanted to be involved in the largest wind market there is, and that’s here in the United States,” according to Joe Baker, CEO of ACCIONA Windpower, “so in 2007 we established our third turbine assembly plant in West Branch, Iowa, with the other two located in Spain.”

ACCIONA is comprised of three divisions: ACCIONA Infrastructures, which was founded in Pamplona, Spain, in 1850; ACCIONA Agua, targeting water treatment and desalination; and ACCIONA Energy, which is involved in hydro, solar, and wind-farm development, construction, and operations. Housed within this division, ACCIONA Windpower designs and manufactures 1.5 and 3MW turbines for both its parent company and third-party clients. This depth and variety of corporate resources often leads to unexpected innovations.

The first and most apparent example has to do with Windpower’s position within the larger Energy division, with its vast experience in the “develop-build-operate” business model, as opposed selling the wind farms it builds to another operator. “This field experience as a utility is what led to the decision to begin designing and manufacturing our own turbines,” Baker says, “because we were familiar with the turbines in operation at that time and felt we could do better. That’s also an advantage when we’re approaching new clients, because they know we’ve been in their shoes and understand their concerns and the challenges they face every day.”

Another benefit of this internal synergy is that it leads to fresh ideas such as the concrete towers for which ACCIONA Windpower is known. “The Infrastructure division is involved in huge construction projects all around the world, such as the Petronus Towers in Malaysia, the Ting Kay Bridge in China, and the Central Coastal Road Network in Chile, so they pour a lot

of concrete. It was during a conversation with members of this division that the idea to build concrete towers for our wind turbines was born. These towers can be formed on site, which eliminates shipping time and costs while at the same time allowing us to contribute to the local economy by purchasing our materials from community businesses and putting them to work for the duration of the project.”

ACCIONA Energy-North America (AENA) also paved the way for ACCIONA Windpower to enter the market by first establishing itself as an operating utility in the States as plans to build the assembly plant proceeded. With a solar farm in Nevada and four wind farms completed and in operation—EcoGrove in Illinois, Red Hills in Oklahoma, Tatanka in North and South Dakota, and Velta in North Dakota—the company’s St. Lawrence Wind Farm in New York State and Dempsey Ridge in Oklahoma are currently in development. ACCIONA Windpower also has projects in the works. The AW-3000 3MW turbine is undergoing testing for ANSI certification and is drawing a great deal of attention. Already being quoted, the AW-3000 will be available in early 2012. And its AW-1500 1.5MW turbine is one of the most rugged and dependable turbines in the world, with three configurations and less than a 1-percent failure rate on major components.

Active in Spain, Australia, Poland, and seeking to establish itself in South Africa and Brazil, ACCIONA Windpower is poised for growth in North America, with its physical presence standing as proof of its commitment. “We didn’t make this decision lightly,” Baker says. “Years of planning went into where we would locate our facility, and we’re already working toward building a domestic supply chain, which will help grow existing businesses and even help draw new ones to the area. We are also involved in a consortium of international wind-energy companies to discuss the future of the industry, because you simply can’t afford to remain static in such a vibrant, innovative market. It is our goal to help establish wind as an ever-growing component of North America’s renewable energy portfolio.” ↘