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SUN MAN VISITS THE WORLD'S FIRST ECO ISLAND



From **BEN JACKSON**
Sun Environment Editor in
Samsø, Denmark

STANDING in the middle of his strawberry patch, farmer Mogens Mahler watches the giant blades wheeling away 150 feet above our heads.

"I was suspicious about whether it would work out," he says. "My hands were sweaty when I wrote out the cheque for the turbine – it was a big moment for me."

Then he adds with a grin: "It was the right thing to do."

This is Samsø, Denmark – population 4,000, and nicknamed "Energy Island". The area is the focus for The Sun's second special report before next week's key UN summit on climate change, in the country's capital, Copenhagen.

In just ten years, the farming community on Samsø has gone from relying on oil imports to producing enough power to be self-sufficient. It is now being hailed as a symbol of how green power can work.

Mogens wheels his bicycle alongside as we walk down several dirt paths leading past turbines belonging to Mogens and his neighbours.

Each one whirls busily in the gusty wind, generating earnings of approximately £20,000 per year as well as power.

But experts agree the secret of success in this blustery green paradise is not so much the bracing wind around us as the islanders, who united to transform this island backwater.

The people living on this isolated strip of land are not hippies but a gentle community of middle-aged farmers who have become worldwide pioneers.

More than one in ten have invested in wind turbines, biomass boilers and other forms of alternative energy, and Mogens is a prime example, having shelled out nearly £120,000 for his own turbine.

Søren Henmansen is the man who first persuaded them to buy into alternative power nearly 13 years ago.

The little island won a competition run by the Danish government in 1996 to find a place that would become a model of power generation for future generations.

"In Britain you have quite an old-fashioned approach," says Søren.

"When you want to build turbines, the Government asks for bids and a giant company or an investment bank will put up the money."

"But the local people never get any benefits, so when the turbines are installed the people who live around them come to hate them."

"Here we persuaded people that if there were going to be changes, they would have a stake in them."



ECO-IMAGES . . .
Mogens gets on his bike, haybale heat generators, above, and the offshore wind turbines.
Right: model Helena

We love wind turbines here, it means money in the bank



EVERY ONE OF US CAN DO OUR BIT

By **HELENA CHRISTENSEN**

DANISH model Helena, 40, is passionate about climate change. Recently, in Peru, she witnessed the effects of global warming first-hand. Here, she offers her views:

FOR so many of us, climate change is an idea belonging in the future. But for millions of people in developing countries, it is a devastating reality.

So much more could be done, and I feel I could do so much more even in small ways. I have to be extremely disciplined and I realise that if it is hard for an individual, it is even harder for politicians who are leading nations.

But I don't see the point of looking to place blame all the time. We as individuals have to make changes, and while countries will try to blame each other it is important to look beyond all that.

We can begin to change this by demanding world leaders cut emissions and provide funding so poor communities can protect themselves from climate change.

Yes, I will be going to Copenhagen. I think maybe it is the most important conference there has ever been.

These days I live in New York and I walk everywhere, sometimes as far as 90 blocks.

I also take cold, short showers and I hardly have any lights on at home.

I guess the showers are a Scandinavian thing, but it helps you to keep your life expectancy high too – that and all the Jägermeister we drink!

My son, Mingus, is ten years old and a boring everything. He is becoming aware that the world is not as rosy as you think when you are younger.

It's important to keep that innocence, but I show him the photos of where I've been in Peru to try to open him up, little by little, to what's happening in the world.

FACTS & FIGURES

- 2 YEARS:** Amount of time the island of Samsø has been self-sufficient in power.
- 51 MILLION POUNDS:** Invested by locals, government and business in turbines and heating plants.
- 8 METRES PER SECOND:** Average wind speed on the neighbouring Baltic Sea.
- 6 YEARS:** How long it will take for the onshore turbines to pay for themselves.



Bernd Moller, technical manager of the academy, pulls up in his electric Peugeot car to take us to one of the heating plants that has replaced Samsø's oil-fired burners.

He shows us how 15 straw bales a day are burned in a biomass furnace.

But no one works here – the bales are dropped off and go into the furnace on a conveyor belt and the heat generated is channelled through seven miles of underground pipes to heat 240 homes.

Five of these plants provide 75 per cent of the heat used by the island's families.

It means an annual fossil fuel bill that was once equal to nearly 11 tons of CO2 per person is now down to virtually nothing. "Farmers and islanders were

afraid to do something new at first, but Søren persuaded them to invest," Bernd explains. "Now we ask people to think local not global, and you can really see the difference."

The changes have fired the imagination of others on the island. Eric Koch Andersen, 64, is an organic farmer who runs his car and tractor on rapeseed oil he presses himself in a solar panel-studded cowshed.

"It doesn't save me money," he says. "I do it because I believe in it. I've watched climate change here over the years – these

days it hardly ever snows – and I wanted to do something." Meanwhile, the greening of Samsø continues.

Forty public buildings await ultimate insulation measures – and the fitting of alarm systems for when energy use is too high. Another offshore wind farm is planned, a turbine is proposed for the north of the island and there are plans to replace petrol cars with electric ones within two years.

Søren says: "In the beginning people thought this was an experiment, but we don't want this island to be a place where people try out technologies – we want Samsø to be a place where they work."

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