

COMMUNITY SOLAR WORKS FOR RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES



VOTE SOLAR



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Rural electric cooperatives provide electricity to 42 million people in 47 states across the country. The overwhelming majority of Americans want more renewable energy, yet it accounts for only 8% of electric co-op power. Individuals and local communities have the right to choose local, reliable, and clean energy solutions.

“As a farmer-owned cooperative, we, like our members, take our stewardship of the land very seriously. Solar power allows us to both improve financial results and help the environment.”

- Bongards' Creameries, Chief Financial Officer, Chris Freeman (6.8 MW SunShare project in Minnesota).

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Local community solar allows your **ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**, its member-owners, and your entire community to **SHARE THE COST-SAVING BENEFITS** of a single solar installation.

Community solar projects provide a cost-effective solution for households, local businesses, farmers, schools and others to go solar even if they rent, have old or shaded roofs, or face financial barriers to rooftop solar.

Individuals and businesses that get their energy from rural electric cooperatives or electric member associations are considered part owners. Each customer is considered a member-owner and has the right to voice how their non-profit electricity provider can serve their local community with clean, renewable energy.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SOLAR?



Community solar allows your electric cooperative and all of its member owners to share the benefits of a single solar energy project. Whether it's installed on a roof or just around the corner, participating in a community solar project allows you to get credits on your electric utility bill for your portion of the power produced.

WHY COMMUNITY SOLAR?



A homeowner is planning to move in the near to mid-future



Renters may be prohibited from installing solar on the property



The roof may be too shaded or will need re-roofing in the next few years



Some commercial buildings have equipment on the roof, obstructing an installation

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY SOLAR?

- Allow member owners and local communities to economically participate in and benefit from new clean energy investments.
- Make solar energy affordable, accessible, and practical.
- Use local solar energy to empower local communities to make local economic decisions.

- *Each megawatt of community solar capacity built generates approximately \$2 million of direct investment in the economy.*

-JEDI Report, 2017

- Give individuals the freedom and choice to go solar.
- Provide homeowners and businesses tangible economic benefits and predictable energy bills.
- Support energy independence by providing local and reliable clean energy supply.
- Opportunity for individuals at all income levels and all communities to access clean energy technology.
- Allows for common ownership and control of clean energy solutions.
- Promote energy democracy through equitable community solar solutions.



“It’s a big thing to know what our bill costs will be for the next few years. It helps us with budgeting.”

- Steve Sidebottom, Delta-Montrose Electric Association Community Solar Subscriber saving 31% of their energy costs (Source: Insights from the Colorado Energy Office Low-Income Community Solar Demonstration Project, December 2017)

CO-OP PROJECT EXAMPLE

CHERRYLAND ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY SOLAR PILOT PROGRAM (Michigan)

- Participants receive about \$350/year in solar bill credits.
- Customers could see a reduction of up to 33% on their electric bills.
- Cherryland, working with the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, identified participants who were low-income, underwent weatherization upgrades to their homes, and completed a home energy assessment to identify low-cost and no-cost opportunities to save energy and money and reduce overall household energy burden.

WHERE ARE COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECTS BEING BUILT?

Rural electric cooperatives have led the nation with the number of voluntary utility-run community solar projects, but they still have a long way to go. As of April 2018, 160 cooperatives offer their member owners the option to choose solar regardless of housing type or income level. There are still over 700 that have yet to offer their members the opportunity to choose local, reliable, and cost-effective clean energy.

CAN I SIGN UP FOR A COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECT?

Contact your rural electric cooperative to see if they already offer a community solar program. If not, talk to your friends, neighbors, and co-op board members about their interest in a community solar program that allows direct access to clean energy. As a co-op member owner, you are part-owner and have the right to weigh in on how your cooperative can best serve your community.

To take a look at other Rural Solar Champions, visit: <http://ruralsolarstories.org/principles>

To see which cooperatives have existing community solar programs, visit: <https://www.electric.coop/wp-content/Renewables/community-solar.html>

For more information and resources, visit: votesolar.org/cs101

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