



Media Release

Solar Panels Help Offset Farm Business Energy Costs

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For immediate release

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Solar energy is generally considered to be good for both the environment and farm businesses. Not only are solar panel installations generating clean energy, they're also a source of additional income for farmers and businesses.

Terry Reesor of Reesor Seed and Grain near Stouffville, Ontario is certainly convinced. His two new solar panel microFIT installations came online this spring and he's pleased with the impact the project has had— both on his energy consumption and on his bottom line.

“We all need to consume less energy and once we had the panel built, its presence makes you more aware of what you're using,” he says. “And it's a good way to generate additional revenue.”

Reesor has a roof mount unit on his grain elevator and a ground mount system installed on a hillside overlooking the company's main building. The ground mount panel is connected into the provincial electricity grid; Reesor sells 100 per cent of his generated power to the grid at \$0.80/kWh and buys back what he needs for his farm and business use at the standard consumer rate.

“For us, this panel is an investment. Although we're producing enough power on normal days to cover our own use, we buy back from the grid,” he says.

The Ontario Power Authority, which buys the electricity, pays its solar generators quarterly and they can track their electricity production online at any time. The ground mount panel harvests the sun in two ways: when there is no sun, the panel lies flat and picks up reflection from the sun; when the sun is shining, it continually and automatically readjusts its angles to pick up the best, most direct light.

Reesor originally caught the solar bug from his cousin, who had spent time in Africa as a missionary. Their church then decided to embark on a social responsibility project to lessen their environmental footprint and installed a rooftop solar panel.

When he went to build his own installation, Reesor was able to access cost-share funding through the Greenbelt Green Energy Program for Agriculture (GGEPA) and the Canada-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program (COFSP).

“The cost-share funding was helpful to us and we were really pleased to be approved for the program,” says Reesor. “It's the kind of project that you like to see funded because there are so many benefits both for farmers and society.”

GGEPA is funded by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and administered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) to provide cost-share funding for farmers to implement best management practices that involve energy conservation and green energy generation. Funding is available to farmers who have projects that have been approved as part of the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and COFSP.

Both EFP and COFSP are funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs under the Best Practices suite of Growing Forward, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The programs are administered by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture acting on behalf of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, and are delivered by the OSCIA.

In order to qualify for GGEPA funding, eligible farm businesses within the Greenbelt must have a peer-reviewed third edition EFP, be approved for COFSP cost-share dollars in the 2010 cropping year and have selected at least one best management practice (BMP) from the GGEPA list.

Four BMP categories from COFSP were eligible for cost-share funding under GGEPA: renewable energy production for agricultural purposes; energy conservation measures for agricultural purposes; farm energy audits; and livestock nutrition planning to reduce greenhouse gases. Reesor's solar installation was approved for 2010 in the category supporting renewable energy production for agricultural purposes. This category is not available through COFSP for the 2011 cropping year. The entire budget for GGEPA has been allocated to approximately 55 on-farm projects in the Greenbelt, and the program is not available for the 2011 cropping year.

"I'm definitely a believer in solar energy and I would absolutely do this again," he says. "In fact, I'm now a seller of solar units myself—so many people were coming to see us about ours that I was doing the sales pitch all the time anyway."

Although there are three or four other solar panels in the area, Reesor says they are currently one of the only ones, if not the sole installation that is hooked up to the grid and working.

Reesor Seed and Grain is a family-owned business in Durham Region that specializes in custom crop protection application, seed sales and grain storage and marketing. In addition to the farm supply business, the Reesors also crop 1,300 acres of corn, beans and wheat.

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