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New Website Showcases Rural Electric Cooperative Champions On Solar Energy

Solar Energy Offers Cleaner Energy, Price Stability, Economic Development – and is Even Helping Pollinators

America's rural electric cooperatives have quietly become solar power leaders in the utility industry. To show examples of this leadership, a new website recognizes rural electric cooperatives in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin who have led at the national or state level.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) recently reported that "the total solar energy capacity of America's electric cooperatives will be five times what it was two years ago." Behind such statistics are stories of cooperative managers and members finding "can do" approaches to develop solar power. This web site tells those stories

"RuralSolarStories.org grew out of conversations with rural electric cooperatives about solar energy. Cooperatives are embracing solar because it is ready and because of an array of benefits that help cooperatives and their members across the Midwest and the nation," said Andy Olsen, Senior Policy Advocate with the Environmental Law & Policy Center. "The web site provides video interviews with cooperative solar leaders to help other cooperatives learn successful strategies and to build upon that experience."

The website includes photo galleries and videos of conversations with leaders from Dairyland Power Cooperative in Wisconsin, Farmers Electric Cooperative in Iowa and Prairie Power, Inc. in Illinois. "Visitors can see for themselves how rural communities from across the upper Midwest use solar energy to meet their 21st Century energy needs and to benefit their members and communities," said Olsen.

The cooperatives highlighted on the site also saw an opportunity to share their experiences developing solar energy.

"The solar program is one of our core strategies to diversify our resource portfolio, and we know from talking with our colleagues that this is a goal of many cooperatives," said Barb A. Nick President and CEO Dairyland Power Cooperative. "We believe that sharing our experience can be helpful for other cooperatives looking to incorporate solar into their generation mix"

Visitors can see how a new innovation to use solar farms to plant habitat for pollinators which aids in recovery of bee and other pollinator populations. In this way the solar farm provides even more community benefit. Instead of laying down gravel, pavement, or common turf grass as ground cover for solar farms, many cooperatives are establishing ground cover with a diverse array of pollinator plants.

This strategy helps to maintain high soil quality, reduce unwanted runoff, and increase crop yields in adjacent farms while providing habitat for pollinator populations. All of this is achieved with reduced or equivalent site development and maintenance costs.

To learn more visit www.RuralSolarStories.org.

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