

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOCAL NONPROFIT HELPS CHEQUAMEGON BAY BUSINESSES TURN SUNSHINE INTO GOLD

Bayfield, WI, September 4, 2018

It's not alchemy but it sure seems like it, turning sunlight into electricity. The reduced electric bills are the same as cash, or gold in this case.

Near Lake Superior in northwest Wisconsin, three farms joined forces last fall soliciting bids from a solar contractor, hoping the group might get a better price than going it alone. Not only did it pan out but the combination of reduced prices, tax incentives, state and Federal grants and a new Ready-to-Install (RTI) system made for a deal no one could turn down. The group was organized by Cheq Bay Renewables, a 100% volunteer nonprofit.

The unique RTI system is from Next Energy Solution (NES), headquartered in Shell Lake, WI, the successful solar contractor for the group. An RTI is a set of parts, blueprints, and instructions the owner uses to self-install the system. A licensed electrician makes the final connections, and NES oversees the project, inspects, and handles the interconnection with the utility company.

Highland Valley Farm, located just outside of Bayfield, is a premier blueberry producer and home of Pikes Creek Winery. It was the first of the three farms to be up and running on solar energy. In June the farm energized its 20kW solar array, tied to Bayfield Electric Cooperative's power lines. Designed to offset 100% of their electrical use on an annual basis it has become the largest privately owned solar photovoltaic (PV) installation on Bayfield Electric's system. Jon Dale, a second-generation co-owner, was awarded a USDA Rural Electrification of America Program (REAP) grant for the farm which paid for 25% of the project's cost.

Hauser's Superior View Farm was next in line securing its energy future by installing a 19.4kW solar PV system. The new rooftop RTI solar array is installed on Hauser's greenhouse support building, supplying electricity to 20,000 sq. ft. of greenhouses, apple grading/cider facilities, and surrounding agricultural buildings. Partial funding for the project came from Focus on Energy's RECIP grant program, a partnership between the State of Wisconsin and its public utilities. The array was commissioned in August and is connected to Excel Energy's power system. Established in Bayfield in 1908, Hauser's Superior View Farm is a multi-generational farm, greenhouse, nursery and orchard.

The third farm, Griggs Cattle Company is just south of Ashland and owned by Toby and Pam Griggs. Specializing in organic grass-fed beef, the new 16.2kW solar array was a perfect complement to the environmentally friendly farm. Like Hauser's, Griggs' PV array is an RTI system, was partially funded by a Focus on Energy RECIP grant and is connected to Excel Energy. Cheq Bay Renewables also assisted in finding local funds to finance the remainder of the project. The refreshingly simple yet effective arrangement connected an investor with the Griggs' solar project via a promissory note with no fees or closing costs.

Six more farms joined the original three through Cheq Bay’s 2018 Solar Group Buy. In a solar group buy the selected contractor offers a solar PV system to the participants at a predetermined price. By creating volume as a group, the participants receive a discounted price. The contractor saves on material costs, installation costs, as well as marketing and customer acquisition costs and passes those savings on to the group. Either recently installed or under construction the six additional farms will all be producing electricity before snowfall.

	System size in Kilowatts	System Type
Elsewhere Farm	5.4	Installed by NES
Happy Hollow Farm	12.96	RTI
Hillcrest Orchards	10.8	RTI
Hungry Hill Farm	3.1	Installed by NES
Turner Road Farm	5.4	RTI
Wild Hollow Farm	8.64	RTI

The six farms that joined CBR’s Solar Group Buy

Why have so many Chequamegon Bay businesses gone solar? The pristine nature of Lake Superior, the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and the surrounding county, state and national forests foster an awareness of environmental responsibility. But in the business world it usually boils down to economics. Unlike residences, businesses can depreciate their expenses, adding one more incentive. Add it all up and an RTI system can pay for itself in as little as 3-4 years. A system that is fully installed by a contractor may take only a few years longer.

Sample 20 kW dc, ground mount	Costs	Incentives	Summary
RTI system cost (\$1.83/watt)	\$36,675		
Balance of system	\$ 4,525		
Total Cost (\$2.06/watt)	\$41,200		
Federal Tax Credit (30%)		-\$12,360	
Bonus Depreciation (21% tax bracket)		-\$ 7,354	
Focus on Energy RECIP or USDA REAP		-\$10,300	
Total incentives		-\$30,014	
Out of Pocket Cost			\$11,186
1st year value of electricity generated			\$ 3,285
Payback time in Years			3.3
20-year annualized return on investment			13.3%

Sample economics for a 20kW RTI system

“Prices on solar PV have come down 73% since 2010” says Bill Bailey, president of Cheq Bay’s board. “Couple that with tax incentives, current grant funding opportunities and utility policies like net metering, and you have a product that makes sense for any Wisconsin business that has

access to the sun.” There seems to be some momentum in northwest Wisconsin that will continue turning sunshine into gold!

Cheq Bay Renewables is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. More information can be found at www.cheqbayrenewables.org.



RTI Field Day at Highland Valley Farm



Hauser's solar array with greenhouses in background