

Coming Shortly: Transition Energy Solar Debut

By Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO,
Richland Electric Cooperative

When it comes to successful product launches in any industry, it is often said that timing is everything. Timing certainly played a valuable role in our efforts to launch the first community-owned renewable energy project in Richland County.

Last year at the 79th Annual Meeting of Richland Electric Cooperative, we announced to members that we would be developing a 50-kilowatt solar energy project in 2015. This project would be fashioned after other electric cooperative community-owned projects that had proven successful, saving us both time and money. The land had been purchased, the preliminary engineering completed, and

...an opportunity to turn a pretty good idea into a great idea was looming.

marketing materials were in development. It seemed as though we were as ready as ever to get underway.

Little did we know then that an opportunity to turn a pretty good idea into a great idea was looming. During the same month that we were putting the wheels in motion for our project, the strategic planning staff at Dairyland Power

Cooperative was discovering just how low the price of solar projects had dropped due to the expected elimination of the investment tax credits at the end of 2015. Developers had gotten real hungry, real fast.

On June 3, 2015, Dairyland Power announced it would be seeking proposals to build up to 25 megawatts of solar generation. One megawatt is 1,000 kilowatts, and our planned project was 50 kilowatts. The proposed Dairyland project would be 500 times larger than ours. We quickly realized that timing and scale may be able to help bring economy of scale to our project; all we had to do was marry them together, which is easier said than done.

Nearly 20 years ago in the infancy of my career here at Richland, a group of us managers got together to evaluate the coming technology of fuel cells, a promising idea that would enable distributed generation. Distributed generation simply means power generators that are distributed throughout electric systems like Richland rather than being more centrally located like large power plants are today. We knew that if we were to be successful introducing fuel cells, or other distributed generation, we would need to work together to “bulk up” our purchases to gain better pricing.

Then, in the spirit of cooperative leaders of old, we did what you might expect—we formed a buying cooperative and named it Distribu-Gen Cooperative. Well, the fuel cell thing didn’t go quite as planned as the technology ran into problems and the promise of a fuel cell



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



in remote areas slowly drifted away. As the original vice-president of Distribu-Gen, I and other officers recommended that Distribu-Gen should live on in order to be ready for any future technologies that may come along.

Then, on June 3 last year, one did.

As a member of the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC) Board of Directors—an organization that might be more appropriately named as a technology cooperative—I was aware that NRTC had developed a relationship with SoCore Energy to market utility-scale solar projects just a few days earlier. It was one of those “a-ha” moments where the pieces were beautifully aligned. All we had to do was get Distribu-Gen and its 25 member cooperatives, NRTC, and SoCore in the same room and put together a proposal that could win the Dairyland Power project, which we knew would be highly competitive. If we could put the best bid together, any Distribu-Gen member, namely Richland, would then be in the driver’s seat to negotiate small projects to “tag-on” to a much larger project and we would realize significant savings.

We spent the next six months finding over 30 sites, one of which was Richland’s Ash Ridge site, scattered around the Dairyland service area in order to accommodate multiple solar farms. Dairyland had made it clear in its request for proposals that it wants many smaller-scale projects rather than a few larger projects. In the end, SoCore developed a bid that ultimately won about half of the project, still plenty to provide any participating cooperative with much better pricing for its community-owned projects than it could have achieved alone.

Richland’s original plans assumed we would build a 50-kilowatt solar garden made up of about 200 fixed solar panels, and the 25-year output of each panel would be sold to members for the one-time price of about \$935. As a result of the coordinated effort, we now plan to build a 100-kilowatt solar farm consisting of 396 panels that will track the sun on a single axis. Tracking panels can produce as much as 25 percent more energy per panel than fixed panels, and their 25 year output will sell for \$699.

Furthermore, our solar farm will have a neighbor—owned by Dairyland Power—that will consist of nearly 2,000 panels generating 500 kilowatts. Two farms, sharing one substation and one power line, helped to keep our local costs as low as possible. Overall, there will be times when the generation from this project will meet the entire

**As a result of the coordinated effort,
we now plan to build a
100-kilowatt solar farm
consisting of 396 panels...**

electric load of the Ash Ridge substation.

Indeed, in this case timing was important, but just as important was a network of people and organizations that could be convinced to work together.

We’ll roll out all of the details about how you can be a part of this exciting project beginning the first full week of April. We’ll have materials available at our annual meeting on April 2 for those who want to make a purchase, and we’re aiming for the groundbreaking in May.

We hope to remain on track with our schedule, but again, timing is everything. We need some cooperation from the weather, contractors, state agencies, and others to meet our aggressive schedule, but we’re confident that we are now right on track. 





HERE'S A FUN WAY TO SPEND YOUR SUMMER...

Youth Leadership Congress highlights the cooperative difference

Are you a high school student in search of a fun and exciting opportunity this summer? Then we've got just the event for you! The 53rd Youth Leadership Congress (YLC), held July 13–15 on the campus of UW–River Falls, offers a mix of workshop sessions, hands-on activities, and team-building experiences that help students identify and explore their leadership potential.

This is not a typical youth conference. First of all, it's developed by and for teens. Students who were elected to the State Youth Board during the previous YLC plan the program each year and help run the event itself. Youth Board members also have the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., the following June and join student leaders from across the nation on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association National Youth Tour.

Also, this is all-expenses-paid conference. Participating students are sponsored by their local electric cooperatives, which even provide transportation to and from River Falls.

Here's what you'll do at YLC:

- See what makes the cooperative business model different and successful and apply this knowledge to fun and challenging cooperative activities.
- Work together with other youth leaders from around Wisconsin to demonstrate the power and value of cooperation.
- Identify and develop your own leadership skills.
- Learn some of the important history that has shaped today's cooperatives.
- Discuss cooperative careers with professionals in the industry.
- Be entertained and challenged by highly acclaimed motivational speakers who understand teens and explore topics important and relevant in your life.
- Experience college life at a University of Wisconsin campus, including dorm living and campus dining!

You won't want to miss this opportunity! Contact Trevor Clark at Richland Electric Cooperative, 608-647-3173 or tclark@rec.coop, for registration materials.



COUNTRY WISDOM

Over the years, I've picked up many bits of country wisdom. Some of it useful. Some of it unusual.

And all of it fun. Here are a few that I like:

- Fellow said he was born with nothing and he has most of it left.
- There are those who have nothing to do and do it exceedingly well.
- The month of March on the farm builds character and challenges optimism.
- When you go out on a limb, make sure no one with a saw is in sight.
- Some bridges should be crossed before you get to them.
- Fellow in the village said he could run so fast that he got to where he was going before he left.
- The neighbor said he was fed up with politics. Said he was switching his alienation from the Republicans to the Democrats.
- Having a fancy house and a shabby barn is like having an expensive car but not being able to afford gasoline.
- When people asked Sam how he was, he always replied, "I'm no better than I ought to be."
- The reason farmers complain even when things are going well is they know the good times never last, and they want to stay in practice.
- If you must brag, do it humbly.
- Fellow went to his school reunion. He met a classmate he hadn't seen in years. He said she had aged so much she didn't even recognize him.
- If you are mad at your neighbor and are compelled to tell him off, practice your speech on your farm dog. With the words off your chest, you'll feel better, and your dog will appreciate the attention he's gotten.

- You can't teach an old horse new tricks. Good thing: Who wants a horse doing tricks?
- There is less mud on the top of the hill.
- The best thing to do when you find yourself in a hole is to quit digging.
- One spring the winds were so strong everyone's land moved to the neighbors'.
- In the business of farming, it's not so important who gets there first as who gets there at all.
- No matter how fast things change, hold onto a few things that don't.
- Never trust a barn cat.
- Some country roads are so crooked that you can see your taillights on the curves.
- Some of the best of what is next has been here all along.
- Olson's farm was so hilly his cows had short legs on the uphill side.
- Next year will be better.
- If you live in the country and don't know what you are doing, rest assured that someone else does.
- One summer it was so hot the hens laid cooked eggs and the cows gave pasteurized milk.



Go to www.jerryapps.com for information about his radio and television work. Contact him at jerryappsauthor@gmail.com if you have a question, a comment, or a good story to share.

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

1027 N. Jefferson St., P.O. Box 439, Richland Center, WI 53581

608-647-3173

www.rec.coop

Find us on Facebook 



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy[®] Cooperative 

Board of Directors

Calvin Sebranek, President • Gerald Wendorf, Vice President • Judy Murphy, Secretary • Daniel Hillberry, Treasurer
Don Huffman, Jim Goplin, Tim Tiller, Steven Fuller, Jeff Monson