



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [News](#).

Wilton farm producing turkeys and a side of solar

By **Bill Lindelof** - blindelof@sacbee.com

Published 12:00 am PDT Tuesday, July 8, 2008

The Nilsen farm in Wilton, which typically produces a half-million turkeys a year, will soon also generate one million watts.

The Nilsens won't own the electricity. The power being generated is owned by a renewable energy company that is leasing Nilsen land next to the turkey houses.

On Monday, the company, enXco, was in the finishing stages of installing 17,000 electricity-generating solar panels on the seven acres of Nilsen land along Apple Road.

When the work is done, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District will buy the power from enXco and sell it to customers.

Then, SMUD customers will be able to go green without having to spend thousands of dollars for rooftop solar.

"I think one of our key target markets are those customers who are green or want to be green," said Rachel Huang, SMUD project manager.

Buying from the SMUD solar farm also eliminates the problem that some homeowners face when their properties are too shady to generate much solar power.

For a fixed monthly fee under SMUD's new subsidized program Solar Shares, most customers can get 20 percent to 40 percent of their energy from the solar farm. The precise price and percentage of solar consumption depends on annual energy use and other details.

But buying into the program doesn't necessarily mean a savings is in store.

For instance, if a homeowner who normally spends \$1,000 a year on electricity for a single-family home signed up for Solar Shares, that customer would pay about \$100 more annually. In exchange, the customer could brag about getting 20 percent of his or her energy from solar.

Like those who own a home solar system, subscribers to Solar Shares will get credit on their energy bill for power from the solar farm. So even though there is a fixed cost, customers will get a credit on their bill based on solar generation.

Huang said large arrays of panels on commercial buildings or in farmers' fields provide an economy of scale that lowers costs – as opposed to small systems on many rooftops.

The Wilton solar photovoltaic array, including the thin panels and metal racks that hold them slightly tilted to the southern sky, are made in the United States.

"This is energy independence in action," said Mark Tholke, regional project development manager for enXco.

The power purchase agreement between SMUD and enXco will cost the utility \$9 million for 20 years.

Instead of building the solar farm itself, SMUD entered into the contract with enXco because the company could

take advantage of federal tax breaks. SMUD could not get the tax credits because it is publicly owned.

Solar Shares monthly fees for customers are fixed and guaranteed not to increase as long as the customer remains on the program and within SMUD territory.

Given energy price trends, this guarantee provides participants with electricity price-hedging benefits, Huang said.

Norm and Tim Nilsen, father and son, think solar and turkeys go together. The silent sun collectors don't bother the birds that stand around in 12 air-conditioned barns.

And the fenced solar farm provides a buffer zone between the road and the yard, providing some disease protection for the birds. It also gives the family farm another revenue stream.

"It works out slick for us," said Tim Nilsen.

The program starts Monday. For more information, call SMUD at (888) 742-SMUD or e-mail SolarShares@smud.org.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

Copyright © [The Sacramento Bee](#)