

Egg industry switches to on-farm solar



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Egg farmers are embracing renewable energy at an unprecedented rate, with a huge uptake in large-scale solar projects over the last six months.

Solar installations at egg farms with a combined capacity of 7000 kilowatts are currently under construction or have been completed since August 2017, equalling approximately 10,000 tonnes of offset carbon dioxide or more than 2000 cars taken off the road for a year.

Pace Farm, one of Australia's largest egg farming groups, has invested \$3.2 million in three large-scale solar projects across their New South Wales farms over the last six months.

General Manager, Paul Pace, said the annual output across the three sites will be 2.7 million kilowatt hours - enough to power more than 400 homes.

"Every kilowatt hour of energy produced by the sun is a kilowatt hour you don't have to buy, and with energy prices rising the way they have it made good business sense for us," Mr Pace said.

"But we're only one of a stack of businesses across the egg industry making the investment in solar. Roof space is at capacity for some farmers and we're now seeing ground mounted systems being installed."

Energy is a major input and significant cost in all agricultural production but the egg industry is particularly exposed to price hikes as most hens are kept in climate controlled sheds. Solar is an effective source of energy for egg farms as the size and timing of daily peak demand mirrors peak energy production as more energy is used to cool sheds during the middle of the day.

Natalie Collard, the Clean Energy Council's Executive General Manager Industry Development, said many agricultural operations are actively looking for ways to slash their bills in the long term.

"The egg industry is switching to solar in a big way and that's good for jobs, it's good for their competitiveness and, ultimately, good for consumers as well," she said.

"Regional parts of Australia need these operations to succeed because of the many thousands of people they employ, and it is fantastic that renewable energy can be a part of driving that success."

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Photo caption: Pace Farm has invested in three large scale solar projects across their NSW farms. Photo courtesy of Todae Solar www.todaesolar.com.au

Background

The egg industry is very reliant on reliable and affordable power. The large scale flocks required to supply the volumes demanded by Australian consumers are protected from harsh conditions in climate controlled sheds that have a minimum requirement of three phase power from the electricity grid.

As land on or near the grid is contested by higher value residential and industrial use, egg farms are regularly pushed further afield which exposes them to bespoke and high cost electricity distribution.

Continuity is also a critical issue to ensure hen welfare can be maintained, meaning egg farms require industrial diesel generators on site to be used in the event of a black out. The egg industry has been substantially impacted by electricity price increases over the last decade where as egg prices have been relatively static. This has provided a strong incentive for egg farmers to explore renewable energy options to remain viable and obtain a competitive advantage.

In contrast to the challenges of the conventional electricity grid, solar energy plays to egg farmers advantages as they generally have available shed roof space or other areas set aside as biosecurity buffer zones that can be used for ground mounted solar installations.

As the price of solar technology has reduced and energy efficiency has increased, the business case for commercial solar has become compelling. Unlike the residential sector, the size and timing of daily peak demand mirrors peak energy production on egg farms as more energy is used to cool sheds during the middle of the day.