

Santee Cooper and South Carolina's electric cooperatives partner to create state's largest solar farm

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Continuing their 12-year-old commitment to growing renewable energy from South Carolina resources, Santee Cooper, Central Electric Power Cooperative, and the state's electric cooperatives are advancing plans to build the largest solar farm in the state.

The Santee Cooper Board of Directors authorized the project Tuesday. The Central Board of Directors approved it earlier today. Upon completion, the solar installation will produce 3,000 kilowatts of electricity. Plans call for installing the solar farm in Colleton County on property located in the service area of Coastal Electric Cooperative headquartered in Walterboro.

"Santee Cooper is pleased to partner with Central and the state's electric cooperatives in planning this project, which will set a new bar for solar power in South Carolina," said Lonnie Carter, Santee Cooper president and CEO. "Santee Cooper started our Green Power renewable energy program in 2001, and in partnership with electric cooperatives already offer that Green Power to customers across South Carolina. We have more than 130,000 kilowatts of renewable electricity online or under contract, all made from homegrown resources."

The size and scope of the solar project will strengthen the stated goals of Santee Cooper and the state's electric cooperatives to explore the most effective way to provide reliable, cost-effective renewable energy to their customers.

"Solar technology has come a long way in recent years, but it still has some real challenges," said Ron Calcaterra, president and CEO of Central Electric Power Cooperative. "It's not 'on' all the time — it's intermittent — because the sun doesn't shine all the time. And, compared to conventional generation, it costs more, even after factoring in tax incentives. That's why we're doing this, to learn how we can minimize the cost to our members."

The cooperatives and Santee Cooper plan to use the solar farm as a tool for learning how to integrate solar power into a complex power system while still providing reliability and affordability critical to consumers.

"We've been working on this for months," said Mike Couick, president and CEO of The Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, the co-ops' state trade association. "The two teams have a lot of work ahead of them, but we're excited about the progress."

Couick emphasized usefulness and affordability as keys to bringing new energy sources to their full potential. "We will soon have a testing ground where new ideas can become reality in the actual market environment," he said.

Santee Cooper has issued a request for proposals and is reviewing bids now for a third party to construct and operate the plant, with Santee Cooper having the option to purchase the electricity and distribute it through Central to member cooperatives.

Santee Cooper is South Carolina's largest power producer, the largest Green Power generator and the ultimate source of electricity for 2 million people across the state. Through its low-cost, reliable and environmentally responsible electricity and water services, and through innovative partnerships and initiatives that attract and retain industry and jobs, Santee Cooper powers South Carolina. To learn more, visit www.santecooper.com