



We make business grow!

Surprisingly affordable advertising rates | 503.981.3441
Woodburn Independent



Fair, 50° F



Twitter



Facebook

Search:

Go

- News
- Education
- Sports
- Hometown
- Opinion
- Free Access
- Free Classifieds
- Subscriptions
- About Us/Ads
- Young Writers
- Local News
- Features
- News Briefs
- Obituaries
- Regional News
- Police/Safety
- NW News Links
- Submit News
- Archives
- Photos/Videos

Catching the sun... and rain Solar field takes flight in rainy valley

By: [Doug Burkhardt](#)

Published: 2/13/2013 10:02:43 AM

Last Updated: 2/15/2013 4:08:44 PM



Photo By: Doug Burkhardt
Waiting on the sun

Solar panels at the Ilg Solar Farm in Woodburn gather raindrops for now, but even in the wet Willamette Valley, solar power has become a vital source of green energy.

WOODBURN — It won't come as a shock to anyone living in Oregon's Willamette Valley to hear that the region has a reputation for being a soggy stretch of territory.

According to the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center, the Willamette Valley sees between 144-166 days of rain in a typical year, with annual rainfall averaging between 40 and 45 inches.

Yet despite the clouds and rain, the Willamette Valley is increasingly positioning itself as a solar power hotbed, and farmers in the area are starting to take advantage of this new type of "crop."

One of the newest solar farms in the region is under construction just east of Woodburn. Leo Ilg, a sheep rancher, owns 38 acres on Newman Road where a total of 1,632 solar panels — each measuring 3.5 feet by 5.5 feet — are being "planted" to harness energy from the sun.

Ilg is leasing two of his acres to an energy consortium that will operate the solar field on his property.

Before the proposal came along, Ilg was primarily grazing sheep and selling hay. Now, an energy company will be sending him checks for the right to use his land, providing Ilg with an additional revenue stream.

Kirk Cameron, president of Lake Oswego-based NW Photon Energy, said the installation of solar panels on Ilg's land will be completed by early March. Once the system is completed, the owner of the network of solar panels — 3CSolar, which partners with NW Photon Energy — will start pouring electricity into PGE's power grid under a 15-year contract.

The panels will harness and store the sun's energy and create 391 kilowatts of electricity — enough power for roughly 40 homes.

Cameron is a fierce proponent of solar power.

"We're lowering the carbon footprint," he said. "When you wake up in the morning, you see that ball in the sky. It's there every day, and we tap only one percent of its resource — are you kidding me?"

Cameron takes the Willamette Valley's weather profile in stride, explaining that there is no reason to worry about the prevalence of cloudy, stormy days in the region. He pointed out that the Willamette Valley gets more than enough sunshine to make the project efficient.

"Absolutely, our peak times are July, August and September, but we're very cyclical," Cameron explained. "In December, January and February we don't have good production. Probably 70 percent of our generation

Most Read Most Comments

- [Catching the sun... and rain](#)
- [Downtown florist opens doors in time for Valentine's Day](#)
- [New owners take over fitness center](#)
- [Police on lookout for Donald robber](#)
- [No sign of relief from insurance company](#)

(last 7 days)

Top Jobs

- HOUSE CLEANERS
- MIDDLE SCHOOL TRACK COACH
- SELL NEW FORDS
- THE WOODBURN INDEPENDENT
- WOODWORKING APPRENTICE

PUBLIC NOTICES

Always in your newspaper:
now in your inbox, too... and it's FREE!

If nobody knows what's going on, nobody can do anything about it.

publicnoticeads.com/or

happens between March and October, with big spikes in the summer.”

Cameron added that he actually likes the rain.

“When it’s raining, it’s just cleaning my panels,” he joked.

Ilg is also enthusiastic, not only about the extra income the solar panels represent, but because he believes in the green energy project going up on his land.

“We’re seeing it more and more around here,” Ilg said. “It’s kind of a government mandatory deal. By 2025, we have to have one-quarter of our power coming from clean energy — wind or solar. It lets us get away from dams, nuclear and coal. I like that.”

Cameron pointed out that the deal benefits his company as well as Ilg.

“Hopefully, Leo can make more money with solar than with sheep and hay,” Cameron said.

In a unique aspect of the arrangement on Ilg’s land, some of Ilg’s sheep will be put to work in a way that benefits the project.

“This is the coolest part,” Cameron explained. “The sheep have access to the solar field and they will graze, which will maintain the ground cover naturally and reduce maintenance costs. I am not sure if there is another solar field in Oregon that is doing this.”

In a further twist, Cameron pointed out that when he first started looking for suitable land for a solar project in the Woodburn area, he came across one of Ilg’s neighbors and began discussing the possibility of leasing some of the farmer’s land. As they conversed, Cameron came to an odd discovery: The farmer’s neighbor was Cameron’s second cousin.

“I was talking about my background,” Cameron explained. “My mom grew up in Mount Angel and I mentioned her maiden name — Ilg. The farmer said, ‘Hey, my neighbor’s name is Ilg, are you related?’ It was kind of funny.”

Cameron proceeded to drive over to his cousin Leo’s farm for a visit that eventually resulted in the Ilg Solar Farm.

Ilg said he was glad for the way things turned out.

“He’s my cousin, and nice to work with,” he said.

According to Cameron, there is demand for additional solar projects in the area. His company is still in the market for suitable land to lease, and farmers can benefit.

“We’re looking for a couple more sites in the Woodburn-Silverton area,” Cameron said. “I really like the area. There are a lot of farmers, and I think our proposals to lease their land are very lucrative.”

[Share](#) | [Email](#)

 (times rated: 1)

Comments

We welcome comments from registered users. Comments are solely the responsibility of those who post them; their viewpoints are not endorsed by the Woodburn Independent and Woodburn Independent.com. [\(read more\)](#)

no comments have been added

Add New Comment

Type your comments here.

Sections

[News](#) / [Education](#) / [Sports](#) / [Hometown](#) / [Opinion](#) / [Classifieds](#) / [Special Sections](#) / [Public Notice](#)

WoodburnIndependent.com

[Archives](#) / [About Us](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Commenting Policy](#) / [RSS Feeds](#) / [News Alerts](#) / [Mobile Website](#)

Services

[Subscriptions](#) / [Advertising Rates and Promotions](#) / [Place Classified Ad](#)

Eagle Newspapers, Inc.

[Corporate](#) / [CanbyHerald.com](#) / [MolallaPioneer.com](#) / [NewbergGraphic.com](#) / [WilsonvilleSpokesman.com](#)