

Looking Towards Pennsylvania's Energy Future

“You just don't talk about greenhouses and energy conservation at the same time.” That's what Cindy Latchaw heard from the manufacturer of her greenhouse when she called to find out what advances had been made in efficiency in the nine years since it was installed. There hadn't been any. “Energy use wasn't on their minds at all.”

That's why she was glad to read about Solair Energy in the PASA newsletter. Latchaw, who began producing hydroponic vegetables at her Mercer County Fair Winds Farm in 2002, immediately got on the phone to Pam Denlinger, Solair's founder and CEO. This initiated an energy audit process for Fair Winds Farm that continues to this day.

Solair Energy provided equipment that Latchaw used to measure energy demand of equipment in her farming operation, and generated ideas for retrofitting her old greenhouse to conserve energy. One suggestion was to insulate the bottom where heat rails are located, so heat is reflected inward instead of being lost. Solair determined the best site on the property for a potential wind turbine, and estimated costs and benefits of locating solar panels on top of the packing shed and market/auction house.

Helping clients explore options for reducing energy bills is just one of the services provided by Solair, which was founded by Denlinger in 1995. The company, based in Lycoming County, travels throughout the state to service customers with renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable design solutions.

Denlinger, who has worked in the energy conservation field since 1987, founded the company to provide energy conservation services for public utility programs. “It was a door of opportunity to do something I enjoyed and believed in.” Soon opportunities came to venture into solar energy, as Solair contracted with the PA Energy Association in 2001 to offer statewide training for the PA Renewable Energy Pilot Program; then cultivated their own installation crew to perform solar water heating and photovoltaic installations.

Last year Solair installed a number of small wind systems throughout the state. Pam says, “I love providing people with this technology. People are often excited to find we are here — homegrown, local providers of renewable energy systems! I also love being able to offer a two-pronged approach of reducing customers' energy needs through state-of-the-art energy conservation, and providing renewable energy



Photo above: Solair Energy, Inc. founder and president, Pam Denlinger and installer Michael Fisher at the recent PASA conference.

systems for them. This makes a great combination of services.”

Solair is currently seeking customers with downhill streams to venture into microhydro energy. “It can be a very productive energy system for people who own this resource. Unlike the wind or the sun, a good downhill stream runs constantly year-round, so it generates electricity for a comparable cost to a photovoltaic system or small scale wind turbine.”

Being a small business owner is always a challenge but has its own rewards. “All of us at Solair Energy feel good about being able to make a difference. Business is business, but it's not always about the bottom line. Like many PASA members, we have a missionary zeal to help people, including fellow PASA members and farmers, to make their corner of the world a more sustainable place.” ■



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