

Solar company seeks annexation agreement with Arcola

Property is split between city and county jurisdiction

By Dominik Stallings

Partridge Solar LLC has plans to build a community solar farm on the property of Arcola resident Steve Holiday.

Partridge Solar and Cultivate Power, its parent company, introduced themselves to the Douglas County Board on March 15. The company will also meet with the plat and planning subcommittee meeting on April 6.

According to Cultivate Power's website, it is a distributed solar and storage platform. The company develops energy resources that integrate with the community and grid to bring economic benefits to local communities.

According to Kiera Gavin, a representative from Cultivate Power, the company is relatively new, and was formed in May 2022. The founders are based in Los Angeles and the San Francisco areas. Gavin said the founders have experience working in Illinois and worked for California-based Cypress Creek Renewables before forming Cultivate Power.

Their website states, "Our top focus is cultivating land into distributed renewable energy projects and ensuring that our projects benefit their local communities."

Before any work on the project can start, the company is seeking an annexation agreement with Arcola.

Half of the property that is planned to be used lies within the 1.5-mile jurisdiction of Arcola. According to Kiera Gavin, a representative from Cultivate Power, problems regarding project permits could arise with the split jurisdiction between Arcola and the county.

"We are seeking some kind of administrative clarity on the jurisdiction," said Gavin.

Gavin said an annexation agreement would give Arcola authority over the property regarding permits. It would allow the company to go forward with working toward the project. Arcola wouldn't see any responsibility for water or other utilities.

Gavin said the company has

a lease with Steve Holiday and expects to use approximately 36 acres to build the solar farm.

According to Gavin, the panels would have a relatively low impact on the surrounding area. She said the panels would be built on the western part of the property, 1,400 feet away from the closest road. The panel's maximum height is 12 feet. The panels tilt and always face the sun.

The panels are built on steel posts with limited concrete. The whole site would be planted with native Illinois grasses. These precautions are also required by the Illinois Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement, which helps landowners ensure land is restored to the pre-project condition in case of decommissioning.

Gavin said the company plans to speak with neighbors in the coming weeks to answer questions and concerns.

Community solar projects can help residents save money on their energy bills. The savings would come through a

subscription offer to the solar project. Gavin said the exact figures would depend on the subscription offer, but a 10 percent decrease is common.

According to the Citizens Utility Board's community solar page, each month, you'd pay Partridge Solar LLC for the amount of electricity generated by your subscription. Usually, with a discount. Partridge Solar LLC would then report the output of the subscription to Ameren, who would then add credit to your electric bill equal to the output. The Citizens Utility Board's website offers more information on community solar projects, including examples.

Gavin said Partridge Solar earns revenue by selling power to subscribers below market rate and from payment received for renewable energy credits (RECs) produced. The REC payment is an incentive for each megawatt-hour of clean, renewable energy added to the grid. The RECs are purchased and "retired" by Ameren in accordance with

the Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act.

Renewable energy credits represent energy generated by renewable energy sources.

Arcola and Douglas County could also see benefits in added tax revenue with the solar project.

Solar farms pay taxes for each megawatt of produced power. Gavin said the first year in which a farm is built is the most significant increase. She said the parcel of land that the solar project would be built on was valued at around \$49,000 and owed around \$3,000 in tax revenue in 2022. With the solar farm, the value would increase to around \$418,000 and generate around \$33,000 in the first year. Gavin said that would depreciate over time. The taxes generated would go toward Arcola and Douglas County.

If the annexation agreement goes through, there would still be several steps and months of planning before any construction can happen.

Gavin said the compa-

nies will have to do a many-months-long study with Ameren regarding the connection of the project to the grid.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources also requires studies regarding the Endangered Species Protection Act and the Interagency Wetland Policy Act of 1989. The study would produce a natural resource report to find out if the location of the project is suitable.

If the solar project goes through, Gavin said the companies hope to form closer bonds with the community. Gavin said Cultivate Power discussed annual scholarships with Parkland and Richland College, which would go to Douglas County community members.

They also plan to donate annually to local agencies such as the Arcola Fire Protection District and the Douglas County Farm Bureau in order to invest locally and be a good neighbor in the community.

Future of autonomous farming equipment taking shape

By DAN GRANT
FarmWeek

The use of driverless ag equipment might seem like something from a science fiction movie, but it's already gaining ground on farms today.

And some of that technology was on display to farmers from around the world at Commodity Classic in Orlando, Florida, as equipment manufacturers set their sights on improved ag efficiencies.

"We are committed to moving forward as an industry," said Matt Olson, precision ag manager for John Deere. "When you look at the future, we continue to evolve at an increasingly fast pace because of technology."

John Deere released its first autonomous tractor for tillage operations last year — 8R tractors with a TruSet-enabled chisel plow, GPS guidance and advanced technologies.

The unit features six pairs of stereo cameras, which enable 360-degree obstacle detection and calculation of distance.

And it's just the first in what Deere envisions as an entire lineup of autonomous

equipment.

"We are committed by 2030 to have a fully autonomous production system for row crops, from planting and spraying to harvest and tillage," Olson said.

And it could radically change how farmers manage their operations.

"We've gone from managing the whole farm, to fields and more recently to zones," Olson said. "When you look at the technology we have now, we're able to manage at the plant level through sensors, machine learning and through automation."

Deere's new See and Spray Ultimate is one example. The new technology can reduce non-residual herbicide use by more than two-thirds by target spraying weeds.

See and Spray Ultimate uses 36 cameras on a 120-foot sprayer boom to scan more than 2,100 feet at once to apply herbicide only to weeds it detects. Its ExactApply nozzle control technology also helps reduce potential drift.

The latest See and Spray advancements are for model year 2023 John Deere 410R,

412R and 612R sprayers.

Deere also unveiled new ExactRate technology this year to precisely monitor and control applications of liquid fertilizer during planting. ExactRate is compatible with select models of John Deere planters with electric drive, including 1775NT, 1795, DB60, DB44 and DB66 units.

How do farmers prepare for automated technology?

Olson recommends they get comfortable with the JD Operations Center, gain expertise in how to work with a connected machine and make sure their farms have high-fidelity boundaries.

Meanwhile, Case IH advanced its development of autonomous technology when it unveiled its TriDent 5550 sprayer with Raven Autonomy at last year's Farm Progress Show.

Farmers can run the applicator with Raven Autonomy from any mobile device.

"That's considered supervised autonomy," Kendal Quandahl, Case IH precision technology marketing manager from Waterloo, told FarmWeek at Commodity Classic.



A JOHN DEERE 8 SERIES tractor, featuring autonomy-enabling hardware, sits on display at the 2023 Commodity Classic in Orlando. Photo by Daniel Grant for FarmWeek.

"You can have multiple machines in one field controlled by one operator."

Case IH introduced the autonomous sprayer through market research with farmers, who identified field applications as one of their top labor

pain points, Quandahl noted.

"One of the spotlights for us is the path to autonomy Case IH is working towards," she said. "One of the biggest things we have to help producers understand is it's not just a driverless machine, but rather

a series of automated equipment."

Case IH also recognized past achievements in ag equipment design at Commodity Classic as it continued its celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Farmall, an original brand of International Harvester.

"We're very excited about the past and innovations on farms from 1923 to today," said Joe Miller, Case IH tractor market segment lead. "We're kicking off the next 100 years of Farmall."

Case IH recently launched new Farmall 90 and 120 model tractors, geared toward specialty markets.

The company is also giving away a Farmall 75C tractor as part of the 100-year celebration. Visit the website, Farmall100.com, for more information about that or go to CaseIH.com to learn about all the latest innovations.

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Toy auction

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"Vernon worked his tail off and he got it to this point because of his integrity," said Calvin. "He's honest and that's why it's become so big."

Vernon Miller, a collector of Allis-Chalmers tractors, has several reasons to buy from the auction. His father, a farmer, purchased a lot of Allis-Chalmers machinery and helped Miller get a job at an Allis-Chalmers dealership in Toledo. The dealership and the company itself also helped Miller receive an education as a mechanic.

"They're helping themselves, and they're helping you. It's a two-way street," said Miller.

The tractors he purchases are also something he can bond with his grandson. They restore the toys together. He sandblasts, repaints, applies new decals and attaches a fresh set of tires on some tractors. He even replaces the mufflers on some models that are more detailed.

The tractors aren't just for show, either.

"I've got two tractors that have 150 miles in a sandbox," said Miller.

He uses two-stroke engines from model airplanes to mo-



BID SPOTTERS help the auctioneers find bidders during the March 25 Toy Auction. The audience patiently waits and listens for their desired items. Photo by Dominik Stallings.

torize the tractors and use them to pull things, just like a regular-sized tractor could.

"This is what I used to farm with. I rode on these and actually farmed with them. I guess it goes back to heritage. It's memorabilia," said Miller.

His tractor collection is also something that he can pass on to his family.

"I never sell them, and I can hand them down to my grandson," said Miller.

Quilt show

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Entries will be judged in each of five categories: Baby, Wall Hanging, Antique, Pieced (pieced machine quilted and pieced hand quilted), and Mixed Techniques. Ribbons and gift certificates will be awarded for first, second, and third place in each category along with the Best of Show winner receiving a \$100 gift certificate and all

are redeemable for merchandise at participating Arthur merchants. Visitors to the show will determine the winner of the People's Choice Award ribbon.

Those in attendance will also have the opportunity to enter a raffle drawing to win a queen-size Double Wedding Ring quilt. The drawing will take place on Saturday afternoon.

In addition to the quilts on display, there will be a mar-

ket/vendor area and a lunch stand with cheeseburgers and barbecue sandwiches, wraps, taco salads, cinnamon rolls, desserts, and drinks available by the Kitchen of Doris Yoder.

To obtain an entry form, entry rules, vendor space, or additional information contact Jolene Stutzman, committee chairperson, at (217) 543-2287 or email her at stitchandsew20@gmail.com. Forms can also be downloaded

at arthuril.us or illinoisamish-country.com. Entry deadline is April 14. There is a small fee per item.

For over three decades attendees have come from all over the state and even some international visitors each spring to the annual show and auction to see some of the finest crafted quilts you'll find anywhere. It attracts entries from all over Illinois, including many Amish-crafted quilts.