

Community Solar Projects in Maine

What is a Community Solar Farm?

A community solar farm (CSF) is much like a community garden, but producing electricity instead of tomatoes. Instead of mounting solar panels on their homes or businesses, investors own shares in a common solar farm. The electricity generated at the solar farm is fed directly into the utility's distribution grid, and the investors' electric bills are credited with that energy, offsetting metered energy use.

What is the goal of Community Solar?

Community solar farms give everyone the opportunity to generate their own electricity. This power is not only environmentally sustainable, but also makes good financial sense. Community solar projects open the door for energy self-reliance to people who rent apartments, own condominiums, or have shaded or small rooftops.

What are the advantages of Community Solar?

Community solar farms reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, resulting in a cleaner environment and a healthier local economy. Community solar farms:

- Reduce Maine's carbon footprint and reliance on imported fossil fuels;
- Improve economies of scale, compared to individual rooftop installations;
- Project site selected for optimal energy production, without the constraints of matching the slope and direction of a building's roof;
- Increase public visibility and understanding of solar energy; and
- Generate local jobs.

Are there Community Solar farms operating today?

Yes. In Maine, South Paris has a successful, operational community solar farm; another is in progress in Edgecomb. Community solar projects are supported by Maine's utility laws and regulations. Elsewhere in the United States, community solar projects are growing in popularity.

How can I participate in Community Solar?

You could own a share in a community solar project, host a community solar farm at your property, or both. Sierra Club's Climate Action Teams can help to bring prospective shareholders and property owners together to build successful community solar projects.

Are Community Solar farms good investments?

Residential solar projects in Maine typically have a 10–15 year payback. Owners also benefit by having a stable cost of power for the approximately 25 year project lifetime. The biggest payback may be in knowing that you have reduced your carbon footprint, helped create good jobs in the state, and increased your reliance on local resources.

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What are my responsibilities and benefits as a Community Solar shareholder?

As a shareholder, you provide a portion of the money needed to hire experienced professionals to design and install the community solar farm. Individuals receive a federal tax credit for 30% of this cost. You will also be responsible for your share of on-going costs, such as insurance and maintenance. Once the farm is producing power, Central Maine Power (CMP) reduces the power usage on your electric bill by your share of the farm's output, saving you not only the cost of power but also the cost of distribution and all other usage-linked charges. If your usage in one month is below your share of the power generated, CMP will roll your generation credits forward for up to 12 months. You can sell your share if, for example, you move out of the CMP service territory.

What are my responsibilities and benefits as a Community Solar host?

Hosting a community solar farm is easy. An ideal site will have 2,000 sq.ft. or more of open land or rooftop with unshaded southern exposure, and electric service at or near the site. A licensed and insured professional will design and install the solar array, which is owned and maintained by a company set up by the investors in your project. That company will also maintain appropriate insurance.

How can I learn more?

Contact Glen Brand (glen.brand@sierraclub.org) or call 207-761-5616.