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Contact: Adam Kotin • (916) 587-1342 or adam@calclimateag.org

Farmers across California cheer CPUC's renewable energy decision

Farmers across California cheered today as state regulators upheld the system of Net Energy Metering (NEM), which allows easy and affordable renewable energy generation on farms, ranches, businesses, and residences. Assembly Bill 327 (2013), which required the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to review and possibly revise NEM, had raised concern about its future.

The CPUC also upheld a net metering provision of special importance to farmers, Net Energy Metering Aggregation (NEMA), which was approved by the legislature in 2012 and has led to a surge in on-farm solar installations. NEMA lets farmers use a single solar array to offset energy use on multiple meters—for example, for meters on irrigation pump in faraway fields—thereby keeping farmland for food production while cutting costs and red tape.

While agriculture consumes about seven percent of total statewide electricity, an estimated one in ten California farms generates renewable energy—largely because of NEM. [Twenty-three state legislators](#) recently asked Commissioners to keep NEM accessible to farms. Joining them was a group of [35 agriculture organizations](#), including the California Climate and Agriculture (CalCAN) which has been an advocate for farmers at the CPUC for several years.

At [Full Belly Farm](#) in the Capay Valley, close to 80 percent of the packing shed energy usage is offset by solar generation. Co-owner Paul Muller says, "With net metering, our on-farm solar alleviates stress on the grid at peak electricity hours, when our need for cooling and pumping water is greatest. Also, meter aggregation allows us to put a single array in a defensible location without taking good land out of production – it's absolutely essential."

[Ridge Vineyards](#), with operations in Healdsburg and Cupertino, was an early adopter of on-farm renewable energy, installing a 66 kW solar installation in 2003. David Gates, Vice President of Vineyard Operations, says, "Thanks to net metering, we are looking to expand our solar footprint in the near future. Our solar installation saves on energy costs and aligns with our approach to sustainable winemaking."

Teixeira and Sons in Los Banos is preparing to hook up a solar array that they expect will meet most of the farm's energy needs. According to farmer John Teixeira, "Aggregating our meters using the NEMA program means we can become energy independent, which is a great financial move for our farm."

[California Climate and Agriculture Network](#) (CalCAN) co-sponsored the bill that established NEMA (SB 594) and advocated on farmers' behalf before the CPUC. Associate Policy Director Adam Kotin says, "This decision gives farmers a practical way to lower their carbon footprint by maximizing the on-farm renewable energy they produce. By continuing meter aggregation, the CPUC recognized agriculture's important role in providing solutions to climate change."

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The California Climate and Agriculture Network is a coalition of sustainable and organic agriculture organizations and farmer members. We work to advance agricultural solutions to climate change.

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