

Massive solar power farm dedicated in Central Valley

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MENDOTA -- The first “utility-scale” photovoltaic solar electricity plant to connect to the California Independent System Operator’s transmission grid under the state’s Renewables Portfolio Standards program has been dedicated.

Meridian Energy USA (formerly Cleantech America) built the system, dubbed the CalRENEW-1 Solar Farm, near Mendota in the Central Valley.

While many large solar projects have been announced by California’s utilities, and two slightly larger solar farms (one in California and one in Nevada) are delivering electricity to Pacific Gas and Electric Company, CalRENEW-1 is the first to achieve approval from the California Independent System Operator to deliver zero-emission solar power directly to the transmission level grid.

This is significant, according to Meridian Energy, because it enables electricity from solar facilities like CalRENEW-1 to be scheduled directly into the grid so that it can be moved over utility lines to meet electricity demands elsewhere.

"Commercial operation of this project serves to broaden our renewable portfolio and aid our state in reaching its clean energy goals," says Fong Wan, senior vice president of energy procurement for PG&E.

CalRENEW-1 will deliver 5 megawatts of emissions-free solar electricity to PG&E under a long-term power purchase agreement. It generates electricity from more than 50,000 solar modules that occupy 50 acres of formerly fallow farmland.

“It is noteworthy that CalRENEW-1 was developed and financed entirely by Meridian Energy USA,” says Meridian Energy USA CEO Bill Overholt. “And we are proud of the fact that we were able to recruit and train Mendota and other area residents to be installers, so that more than 70 percent of the labor involved in construction went to local residents.”

CalRENEW-1 was a collaborative effort between Meridian Energy USA, PG&E, Cal-ISO and the city of Mendota, which is providing the site for the facility under a long-term lease.

Meridian says the project team brought the facility in on time, within budget and “with an impeccable safety record.”

Engineering and installation of the facility was provided by Quanta Renewable Energy Services. Sharp Electronics Corporation’s Solar Energy Solutions Group supplied the thin film photovoltaic modules, the first major deployment of Sharp’s amorphous thin film product in the U.S.

The facility is owned and operated by Meridian Energy USA, a wholly-owned subsidiary of New Zealand-based Meridian Energy Ltd., which plans to apply the lessons learned developing and constructing the facility to much larger renewable projects in the U.S. and internationally.