

---

## **Gov. Brown, Sec. Salazar promote solar energy near Elk Grove**

### *Solar energy company leases dairy lot*

**Cameron MacDonald, Elk Grove Citizen, 1-17-12**

U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Gov. Jerry Brown visited a solar energy facility near Elk Grove to sign a state-federal agreement to expand California's solar energy projects on Jan. 13.

A few dozen journalists, political leaders, and community members gathered at a Franklin dairy farm where more than 115 acres of pastureland were converted into rows of six-foot long solar panels that capture sunlight for conversion into electricity.

Internet giant Google is among the project's investors.

Brown challenged skeptics of solar power.

"We're going forward and we're going to build," he declared.

Salazar described California as being "the power of the spear" in promoting solar power.

"Today is a reaffirmation that we're on the right track, that we're making believers out of the skeptics who never thought we could capture the power of the sun we're capturing today," he said.

The new agreement aims to add more than a dozen solar energy projects in California as well as 130 more renewable energy projects.

The facility near the corner of Bruceville and Eschinger roads is being built to generate 19,000 megawatts, which would power 12,000 homes, explained Arno Harris, the CEO of Recurrent Energy.

In turn, the electricity would be sold to the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) as part of a 20-year agreement.

SMUD Board President Nancy Bui-Thompson said the power goes to a nearby SMUD transmission line that helps power the Sacramento region.

"We're opening a door to an exciting future that is in so many ways so Californian," Harris said in his Jan. 13 speech.

He mentioned that solar energy is moving away from being an alternative energy source to a mainstream one.

Recurrent Energy is leasing the site's property from a family that's owned the land since the mid 19th century. They still have the original deed that was signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

Property co-owner Glenda Stewart said that a War of 1812 veteran originally owned the property.

She said that she and her sisters initially declined to lease their land to Recurrent Energy.

“It was farmland and we wanted to keep things going the way they were,” Stewart said. “As time went on, we realized it would be important to us to keep the land, plus we liked the idea of green energy, so we’re very excited about it.”

Stewart worked as an assistant to longtime Elk Grove resident and retired SMUD administrator Leo Fassler.

“I think this is a great alternative,” he said. “It keeps the area nice and preserved.”

Stewart’s sister Colleen Adams lives in a house next to the solar panels that were installed last fall.

“Other than the pounding you didn’t really hear anything,” she said about the construction.

Elk Grove City Council Members Gary Davis and Sophia Scherman visited the site on Jan. 13. Both said that such projects will generate jobs.

“This encourages more and more solar energy production and there will be job generation along with it,” Davis said.

Recurrent Energy plans to build more solar facilities in southern Sacramento County.

Galt dairy farmer Leo Van Warmerdam will have a solar facility that’s twice the size of the Franklin site on his property.

“As the (financial) numbers started panning out, (we thought) ‘Maybe we need to take a look at this,’” he said.

Van Warmerdam added that he needed to diversify his dairy business.

”You can’t stick to one business and expect it to be continuously profitable during these volatile times in the dairy business,” he said.

Brown concluded his speech about the state’s solar industry on a note that drew heavy audience applause.

“It’s not easy, there are going to be screw ups, there are going to be bankruptcies, there will be indictments and there will be deaths,” he said. “But we’re going to keep going and nothing is going to stop us.”