FOR OREGON BERRY PACKING, SUSTAINABILITY IS GOOD BUSINESS

SOLAR ELECTRIC AND REFRIGERATION IMPROVEMENTS DELIVER OVER $80,000 IN ANNUAL ENERGY SAVINGS

Oregon Berry Packing Inc., in Hillsboro, has high standards for the blueberries, strawberries and black raspberries it supplies to premium buyers worldwide. Those standards include working to ensure its produce goes from field to market with a minimal carbon footprint. Solar panels on the roof combined with refrigeration controls and high-speed doors have decreased annual energy purchased by an estimated 1.2 million kilowatt hours—saving the family-owned business over $80,000 per year.

"Sustainability is inherent in our culture," said Jeff Malensky, president, Oregon Berry Packing. "It's part of our story."

The 34-kilowatt solar electric system installed produces an estimated 33,600 kWh per year, and the production shows in real time on a monitor in the lobby and on the company's website. "The display prompts discussions with customers about how we're constantly improving all aspects of our operation," said Malensky. "If our efforts to generate and save energy can put a smile on their faces, they're more apt to do business with us."

Inside the processing plant, refrigeration controls trim energy use while keeping berries at 34 degrees Fahrenheit—a critical factor in maintaining that "just-picked" freshness. Each cooler zone has separate sensors and controls that "talk" to a central computer, which optimizes overall efficiency. The sophisticated control system also keeps humidity levels constant, further contributing to berries that boast mouth-watering flavor.

PROJECTS-AT-A-GLANCE

▸34-kW solar electric system

Project benefits

- Lower energy costs
- Improved sustainability

Financial analysis

- $130,500 project cost
- $48,000 cash incentive from Energy Trust

Estimated annual generation and savings

- 33,600 kWh generated
- 18 tons of carbon dioxide saved

> "Many business expenses are going up and can't be controlled. Energy is one expense we can control."
>
> Jeff Malensky, president, Oregon Berry Packing

Energy Trust of Oregon

"Before, our refrigeration units would turn on and stay on until the defrost cycle kicked in," said Malensky. "We were unaware the units didn't need to run all the time. Thanks to the new controls, our refrigeration units are operating much less. The system monitors conditions in the plant for us, and we view everything on a web interface."

With equipment running less, the plant is much quieter for employees. "That silence is music to my ears," said Malensky. "Keeping decibel levels down is critical in meeting worker safety standards."

Oregon Berry Packing rounded out its energy-efficiency improvements by installing high-speed doors that help keep warm air from entering the plant's refrigerated areas.

Energy Trust of Oregon provided technical assistance for the solar and refrigeration projects at no charge, making it easy for Oregon Berry Packing to understand the value of its investments. Energy Trust cash incentives totaling $171,800 helped offset total project costs, which came to $378,000.

"Our interactions with Energy Trust have been very positive," said Malensky. "They specialize in making sure everything about a project is right."

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PROJECTS-AT-A-GLANCE

▶Refrigeration controls and high-speed cooler doors

Project benefits–refrigeration controls

- Lower energy costs
- Precise control of temperature and humidity
- Automatic monitoring with alerts should temperatures vary
- Convenient web interface
- Reduced noise
- Opportunity for higher foodservice safety certification

Financial analysis–high speed doors

- More even temperature
- Fewer insects
- Opportunity for improved safety
- Lower energy costs

Financial analysis

- $247,800 project cost
- $123,800 cash incentive from Energy Trust
- $79,300 estimated annual energy cost savings

Estimated annual savings

- 1,133,000 kWh
- 619 tons of carbon dioxide