



## Save the earth – and the economy

### Community-owned green energy projects helping to drive new business in Southwestern Ontario

**(April 21, 2015)** This Earth Day marks a major turning point for both our planet and our global economy, with a surge in the use of zero emissions renewable energy.

According to a new report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), there was a 31% jump in renewable energy sector investment across Canada in 2014 with \$8 billion spent on developing green energy projects. Locally, community co-ops are developing numerous projects – everything from farm-based biogas and solar projects around Aylmer Ont., to large solar rooftop projects in Waterloo, London, Cambridge and other centres.

“These are very exciting times for renewable energy. Costs have dropped significantly, technology has improved, and electricity system managers have made the leap on integrating these new energy sources. The result is a big upswing in jobs and investment in this sector, exactly what our country needs right now with our oil sector stalling out and the threat of climate change growing,” says Judith Lipp, President of the Federation of Community Power Cooperatives (FCPC).

An important part of the renewable energy growth story is the role of community-owned energy projects. Solar, wind, biogas and biomass projects owned by community co-ops, public institutions and municipalities are delivering triple bottom line returns for communities, including jobs and revenue, environmental benefits, and more resilient local energy systems. Co-ops covering an area stretching from Windsor to Guelph have more than 1,000 projects built or in the works.

“In Guelph, Guelph Renewable Energy Co-op is completing two commercial solar projects that will also help meet the goals of the city’s Community Energy Initiative. These systems are part of a wave of projects for which co-ops have raised more than \$27 million through community bond and share sales across the province – and we’re just getting started,” says board member Evan Ferrari.

The UNEP report makes it clear how a combination of falling costs and improving technology is making green energy the “go to” source of energy worldwide, with 30% more power being put online per dollar invested today compared to 2011. The UNEP report estimates that 2014’s record amount of global renewable energy investment will provide enough zero emission energy to displace 1.3 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> worldwide, the equivalent of eliminating almost all of Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions twice over.

“Ontario made a smart decision to take a leadership role in what is now a booming worldwide industry,” points out Lipp. “Our U.S. neighbours are now installing a solar system every two minutes. Here in Ontario, wind power is already cheaper than new nuclear reactors and we will certainly see even lower prices for all renewable sources in the next round of project procurement.”

Lipp acknowledges that renewable energy development has not been without controversy in Ontario, which is why she believes that community involvement is invaluable. “Studies and real-life experience have both shown that where community members are part of a project, concern about renewable energy largely vanishes,” she points out. “Community ownership can really take wind and solar projects further by involving the community in selecting locations, raising investment dollars, and keeping jobs and investment returns in the local area.”

“The community power sector is, in many ways, the untold success story of Ontario’s green energy efforts,” adds Shane Mulligan, general manager of LIFE Co-op, which is developing solar projects across the province. “We are making renewable energy work for local communities while also making sure our communities benefit from being a part of one of the world’s fastest growing industries. “

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## Community Power Backgrounder

- There are approximately 60 renewable energy cooperatives in Ontario.
- SolarShare and Agris Solar are among the largest renewable energy cooperatives in North America
- Community ownership and municipal approval both give green energy projects priority points under Ontario’s new Feed In Tariff program rules. Virtually every project approved in the latest round of Feed-In Tariff contract awards had municipal approval, co-op participation or Aboriginal ownership.
- Community co-ops use funds raised from members to leverage private financing for projects. To date, the FCPC’s 20-plus member co-ops have made over \$100 million in capital investments in renewable energy projects across Ontario, with many more projects in the pipeline.
- FCPC member co-ops have been collectively awarded more than 1,200 FIT contracts.
- Co-ops essentially “recycle” revenues earned through FIT contracts back to community investors through investment returns ranging (on average) from 5-7% per year.

- One out of six Ontario farmers has an ownership stake in a renewable energy project. Many of these farmers are members of community co-ops, such as Agris Solar. Nine thousand Ontario farms have solar panels and 3,000 have a stake in wind energy projects.<sup>1</sup>
- Solar energy production peaks on hot summer days when power demand peaks in Ontario.<sup>2</sup>
- Wind production peaks in winter and can reduce the need for gas-fired generation during cold snaps.<sup>3</sup>
- Biogas operations often use farm and livestock waste to produce power and heat on a steady basis. The ZooShare co-op will combine animal waste from the Toronto Zoo and grocery store discards to produce power 24/7.
- More Canadians are now employed in the green energy sector than in the oil sands with employment in the Canadian green energy sector growing 37% in the past five years. Worldwide, 6.5 million people are now employed in the sector.<sup>4</sup>

## Local green energy co-ops in Southwestern Ontario

### **AGRIS Solar Co-operative**

Website: <http://agrissolar.coop>

Projects built or contracts awarded: 1000

Contact: Sean Kelly, Director of Membership & Government Relations

Phone: (905) 829-3336 x141

E-mail: [seank@sparksolar.ca](mailto:seank@sparksolar.ca)

### **AMBER Renewable Energy Co-operative**

Website: <http://ambercoop.ca>

Projects built or contracts awarded: 25

Contact: Jamie Kent, Executive Director & President

Phone: (519) 852-6067

E-mail: [info@ambercoop.ca](mailto:info@ambercoop.ca)

### **Community Energy Development Co-operative**

Website: <http://cedco-op.com>

Projects built or contracts awarded: 11

Phone: (519) 279-4045

Toll Free: (855) 274-6890

Fax: (519) 279-4631

Email: [info@cedco-op.com](mailto:info@cedco-op.com)

### **Green Energy Nexus 2 Co-operative**

Projects built or contracts awarded: TBD

Contact: Glen Schrader

E-mail: [glen.schrader@brightraysolar.com](mailto:glen.schrader@brightraysolar.com)

**Guelph Renewable Energy Co-operative**

Website: <http://www.guelphsolar.ca>

Projects built or contracts awarded: 2 (to be completed August 2015)

Contact: Evan Ferrari, Sustainability Consultant

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Email: [evanferrari@hotmail.com](mailto:evanferrari@hotmail.com)

**Local Initiative for Future Energy Co-operative**

Website: <http://www.lifecoop.ca>

Projects built or contracts awarded: 18

Phone: (866) 889-9155

Email: [info@lifecoop.ca](mailto:info@lifecoop.ca)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/Blog/ontarios-quiet-energy-revolution-has-lessons-/blog/51036/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/11/24/2988171/rooftop-solar-cut-peak-demand/>

<sup>3</sup> *Wind energy saves consumers money during the Polar Vortex* – available at [awea.org](http://awea.org)

<sup>4</sup> *Tracking the Energy Revolution: 2014* – available at <http://cleanenergycanada.org/works/trackingtherevolution2014/>