

WINE INDUSTRY NETWORK ADVISOR

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SOLAR POWER GROWING IN WINE INDUSTRY

It's no surprise that wineries are pioneers in a green industry like solar as the success of the grape grower can be measured by how well they interact with the environment. Clean energy and agriculture go hand in hand and solar is proving to be more than the "vintage du jour" in the wine industry, it has taken hold and is here to stay.

"Wineries have been diligent in the implementation of solar power," says Rody Jonas, founder and owner of Pure Power Solutions. Jonas started Pure Power Solutions 18 years ago and has designed and constructed solar projects for high profile wineries such as Rodney Strong, St. Francis, and Seghesio.

"Solar is way past the Prius stage," said Robert Gould of SolarCraft, "it's become mainstream, especially in the wine industry because it is saving people money and more affordable than ever."

"The cost of system installation has gone down 60 percent from five years ago," reinforces Jonas.

In 1998 the state of California implemented a solar rebate program to help finance commercial and residential solar projects, which effectively cut the cost of solar by 50 percent. The intent of the state rebate program was to stimulate a demand for solar energy to the point where the solar industry would no longer be dependent on the rebate. That time is now.

"The state rebate, along with the federal tax credit and accelerated depreciation, have made it possible for a lot of people to finance solar power and start saving money immediately," said Gould, "In 2009 and 2010, we have seen the prices of solar modules drop to historic lows, which has translated to a large drop in project costs. Despite the diminishing state rebate for commercial projects, solar has never been more affordable."



California's financial woes are no secret, hence the state budget is a hot button topic "Some people think the state rebate comes out of the state budget; this is incorrect," said Gould, "the funds for the state

rebate come out of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), not state taxes."

"Solar power is more affordable now than when rebates were at full force," said Jerry Guffey, owner of Mission Capital, who has been financing business equipment for over 25 years, including solar panel systems.

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Despite the down economy, solar power still makes financial sense. "Solar customers get a 30 percent tax credit that comes directly out of your tax bill, that's one third of the cost of the system" said Jonas, "plus, it improves the value of your property without increasing property taxes."

"Solar panels are covered by a 25 year warranty and will last much longer," said Gould, "but accelerated depreciation allows the property owner to write off the system after five years."

Solar technology, although historically proven to be steady, has made advances during the past years. "Systems are more efficient," said Guffey. "Panels are less than half of what they were four years ago. Property owners with limited roof space can afford top of the line panels to maximize efficiency."

There is software available that helps solar owners monitor the output of their system 24 hours a day. "If a solar photovoltaic (PV) system is located in a remote area, our clients can log-in from anywhere in the world and monitor the production of panels," said Jay Brown of Ranch Systems, a company that provides complete remote field monitoring and control. Ranch Systems has provided service in multiple agricultural industries as well as projects for Boeing aerospace company.

"The technology of solar is very solid," said Jonas, "there are no moving parts in the panels and the source of energy has and always will be the same."

"Solar is a safe bet," said Gould, "even on a gloomy day solar panels receive photons."

Present day solar offers considerable savings, primarily in the form of a tax credit and write off, but the future of solar offers multiple returns on investment. "When a property owner's system is paid off and is producing more energy than is being used, the surplus energy which flows back to the grid can be sold back to the utility company, this is called a feed-in tariff," said Guffey, "The state will require utilities companies to buy up extra power, wineries with large solar arrays will not only have self-sustainable energy, but an additional source of revenue."

"The marketing aspect of solar is a bonus," said Jonas, "People feel good about supporting a business that cares about the environment. Solar panels make a visible statement of that commitment."

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PURE POWER SOLUTIONS**