

Morgantown, WV solar co-op offers grant information to farmers, business owners

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By Cynthia McCloud **CONNECT**

Morgantown Solar Co-op, a new group that formed to promote the installation of solar panels on roofs throughout WV, has the minimum number of members it needs to submit request for proposals to solar installers. However, the group is still offering the opportunity to join – this time to the agriculture and business industries.

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Representatives of the co-op are encouraging small farmers and business owners in Monongalia County to apply for U.S. Department of Agriculture Renewable Energy for America Program grants to help fund construction of solar panels on their roofs.

They will have a table of information about the co-op and the grants at the Morgantown Farmers Market on May 30 and will hold an informational meeting just after the market closes.

The REAP grants will pay for up to 25 percent of the cost of solar power systems, according to a press release from the Co-op. The deadline to apply is June 30. The USDA also has loan guarantees available to bring down the cost of financing investment in solar power.

Jesse Gandee, the USDA representative in West Virginia, will work with small businesses to obtain these REAP grants, the press release stated. He can also be reached by email jesse.gandee@wv.usda.gov or phone 304-284-4882.

Membership in the co-op has its privileges, including a group bulk discount on solar panels and installation, Co-op spokespeople have said. Federal tax credits available through 2016 and the decreasing cost of equipment makes solar power appealing to property owners.

The Co-op reports it has enough members to issue a request for proposals to solar installers, but new members can join until just a couple of days before the group needs to make a commitment, probably in June or early July.

WV SUN, a nonprofit that helps make solar more affordable and accessible, is supporting the process. WV SUN is part of the Community Power Network, which has helped hundreds of citizens organize solar co-ops in their communities, including Monroe and Fayette counties. New co-ops are starting to form in Charleston and Wheeling.

The Morgantown Solar Co-op is sponsored by Downstream Strategies and the Morgantown Municipal Green Team. For more information, contact Joey James of Downstream Strategies at 304-292-2450 or jjames@downstreamstrategies.com.

Anyone who cannot attend the meetings but wants to join the Co-op should contact Emily Stiever at Emily.stiever@communitypowernetwork.com or fill out a short form on the co-op's WV SUN website www.wvsun.org/solarcoops/morgantown-solar-co-op to see if your roof qualifies for membership.

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