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Tennessee's First USDA-supported Solar PV System Goes Online

(FAIRVIEW) – A local nursery is now producing a new kind of green – clean, renewable energy.

And it's the first in the state to do it with help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Nashville Natives LLC is among 14 Tennessee business and farms to receive a grant from the USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), and it is the first to see a solar photovoltaic system producing electricity. The grants cover up to 25 percent of the cost of renewable-energy-producing systems, such as purchasing and installing the 8.28 kilowatt PV system at Nashville Natives, which was designed and installed by LightWave Solar Electric, Nashville.

"LightWave Solar Electric is a great partner for USDA's renewable energy program," said USDA State Director Bobby Goode. "They help get solar projects like this one for Nashville Natives off the drawing board and prove the size of the company doesn't matter. Renewable energy can lower the cost of doing business, and that's good for jobs in rural communities."

The Nashville Natives solar array of 36 SunPower panels on the roof of a new equipment barn should offset the cost of the nursery's entire energy demand in an average year. The grid-tied system will feed into the utility lines of Middle Tennessee Electric Membership Corporation, and the Tennessee Valley Authority will pay the nursery for the solar energy at about twice the retail rate MTEMC charges for electricity.

"As a nursery that specializes in native plants and green roofs, this solar project fits right into our whole strategy for being sustainable," said nursery owner Andy Sudbrock.

"We could not have done this without the federal and state incentives," he added.

The 25 percent USDA grant comes on top of a grant from the Tennessee Clean Energy Technology program for another 40 percent of the cost. The nursery business is also eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit.

LightWave Solar Electric, Tennessee's leading solar design and installation company, assisted with the grant applications for both the USDA-REAP and TN-CET programs.

REAP loan guarantees and grants can be used for renewable energy systems, energy efficiency improvements, feasibility studies and energy audits. It is available to any farm or rural business. More information on the REAP program is at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/farmbill/index.html.

Established in the 2008 Farm Bill, REAP incentives foster rural economic development through renewable energy projects and energy efficiency improvements. In FY 2008, grants totaling \$15.8 million were made available, along with \$204 million in guaranteed loans.

Sixteen REAP grants have been made in Tennessee, but the Nashville Natives project is the first to go into service in the state. LightWave is currently installing a second Tennessee REAP-supported project, a 30 kW solar PV system in Bledsoe County.

Nursery owner Andy Sudbrock actually operates two businesses at his rural Fairview location: Nashville Natives LLC, which specializes in plants native to Tennessee, and Southeast Green Roofs LLC, a licensed grower of Live Roof systems, which cover building rooftops with plants to reduce rainwater runoff and help reduce heating and cooling costs. The nursery's electrical demand primarily stems from a pot- and flat-filler machine used in the Green Roof operation, as well as fans and temperature controls for the greenhouse and the irrigation of two acres of nursery production fields.

Over the 25-year warranted life of the panels, the clean energy will offset considerable pollutants from coal-fired power plants: 186.5 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, a leading greenhouse gas; 1,718 pounds of sulfur dioxide, which causes acid rain; and 550 pounds of smog-producing nitrous oxide. This is the equivalent of planting 52 acres of trees. The array is expected to produce electricity for the next 40-50 years.

“Some companies do something, one thing green,” Sudbrock said, “but we’re already green in everything we do. We like to practice what we preach, so going solar was a perfect fit.”

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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About USDA Rural Development

USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, businesses, community infrastructure, homeownership and affordable rental housing in rural communities. Last year Rural Development assisted more than 866,000 Tennessee families and businesses with more than \$619 million in financial assistance through affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants. For more information, contact the Nashville Area Office at 615-783-1359 or find more details at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn.

About Nashville Natives LLC and Southeast Green Roofs LLC

Owner Andy Sudbrock has been in the environmental restoration business in Middle Tennessee since 2003, when he established his nursery in rural Williamson County (Fairview, Tenn.). Nashville Natives is a licensed grower of American Beauties Native Plants, and Southeast Green Roofs is the licensed provider of Live Roof green roof systems in Tennessee, Kentucky and neighboring states.

About LightWave Solar Electric LLC

Tennessee's leading solar design and installation company, LightWave has installed nearly 500 kilowatts of generating capacity, including approximately two dozen commercial systems and three dozen residential systems. LightWave owner Steve Johnson is a licensed electrical contractor with three decades of electrical experience. LightWave has four solar installers certified by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP), including a Professional Engineer and a Master Electrician.