

# Solar harvest cuts energy bill

By TYLER HARRIS

**T**HIS fall, Iowa farmers have the chance to harvest another crop besides corn and soybeans: the sun. The opportunity is available through rebates from energy providers, state and federal tax credits, and bonus depreciation.

One farm family taking advantage of this opportunity is Betty and Dean Van Kooten of Kellogg. The Van Kootens' 120-kilowatt system will have 402 solar panels, or modules, on two separate 60-kilowatt sites. Although not as big as Luther College's 280-kilowatt system in Decorah, "120 kilowatts is definitely going to be up in the top," says Jason Hall, founder and CEO of Moxie Solar, a solar consulting and installation firm in North Liberty. "For agriculture, it's certainly going to be the biggest" solar energy system in Iowa, he adds.

The system will power everything from the Van Kootens' hog barns to grain bins. "We're going to offset 100% of their farming operations' energy use on both sides of the road," Hall says. "The fact that both of the farming operations will be powered by 60-kilowatt systems was really just coincidence in their respective consumptions."

By completing an online self-assessment, certain farm and commercial property owners can receive a rebate of up to

## Key Points

- Deadline to apply to receive rebates on solar energy system is Dec. 31.
- Net metering lets owners sell energy credits to grid, offsetting electricity costs.
- With micro-inverters under modules, owners can monitor system online.

\$25,000 per facility. Until Dec. 31, 2016, a 30% federal income tax credit and a state income tax credit at 15% of the cost of the system are available. Considering just the income tax credits, almost 45% of the gross cost is immediately eliminated.

Then, coupling the potential for a \$25,000 rebate and the bonus depreciation of the system, a \$100,000 system might only cost \$15,000 net to the farmer. "It's not unheard of for us to see the net cost to our customers at around 15% of the total cost," Hall says. "Every situation is different, however, and we always advise people to work with their tax professional." These combined savings make solar power attractive. "I can't think of any investment with such high returns but low volatility and risk."

The self-assessment must be submitted to Alliant Energy by Dec. 31. "By completing the self-assessment, they secure that the project has to be finished by the



**COST SAVINGS:** Moxie Solar project coordinator Ashley Vanorny and founder Jason Hall show a residential solar module. With net metering through providers like Alliant Energy and Mid-American Energy, system owners can sell energy credits to the grid to offset costs. With rebates and tax credits, the systems can pay for themselves.

end of the next 12 months," says Ashley Vanorny, project coordinator at Moxie Solar. "The project doesn't have to be done by the end 2013. You just have to get the ball rolling." A third-party energy audit is also required. The audit is done based on type of property and energy expectations.

Moxie Solar goes through the paperwork to help each customer on a project understand the process. "Everybody walks away with their own binder, and e-binders are available," Vanorny says.

These solar systems pay for themselves

over time. Owners can sell energy credits to the grid to offset their electricity costs with net metering, available through Alliant Energy and Mid-American Energy. With Alliant Energy, the credits are worth the total retail value. "We can have these systems paid off in 3.5 years," Hall says. "The return on investment can be up to 900%. If it's going to produce for 30 to 35 years, it's a heck of an investment," Hall notes. "With Alliant Energy this system will probably be producing for you for free for 30 years."

See [www.moxiesolar.com](http://www.moxiesolar.com).

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