

Rural Business and Cooperative Service • Rural Energy for America Program

## Food Co-op Provides Leadership on Sustainability Issues

Since it was founded nearly half a century ago, the Ashland Food Co-op in rural southwest Oregon has modeled social and environmental responsibility. In addition to providing sustainably grown, local, organic food, this consumer-owned grocer also strives to minimize its impact on the environment and has set a goal to become a zero-waste, carbon-neutral business by 2030.

Reducing your carbon footprint can come at a high up-front cost for any business, but the Ashland Food Co-op was able to take a significant stride toward achieving its goal with assistance from USDA Rural Development. A Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant of \$27,000 from USDA helped offset the cost of a new rooftop solar electric system.



*Ashland Food Co-op's 39-kilowatt solar system is decreasing its carbon footprint, reducing its utility costs, and supporting its sustainability goals.*

“The REAP grant made the project a no-brainer,” said General Manager Emile Amarotico.

Installed in 2017, the co-op's new renewable energy system is generating about 45,600 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year, which is enough to power four residential homes. It is supporting this certified organic retailer's goal of providing leadership toward a clean energy future by decreasing its carbon emissions. It is also benefiting the co-op's 10,000 members by reducing the business's monthly utility bill, helping to lower operating costs.

The Ashland Food Co-op received recognition for its efforts when the National Co-op Grocers awarded it with the Co-efficient Sustainability Star for creating positive sustainability impacts. But the co-op is not done yet. “The road to 2030 will be difficult,” said Amarotico. “But we're confident that with the support of our community and owners, we can do it.”

The co-op will keep expanding its use of renewable energy, diverting its waste from landfills, and improving its conservation practices, as it has been doing since a small group of families formed the buying club in 1971. Its new renewable energy system brings the co-op one step closer to achieving carbon neutrality, demonstrating that a rural business can prosper while also becoming a leader on issues important to the community.

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<b>Obligation Amount:</b>	\$27,244 grant
<b>Date of Obligation:</b>	May 2017
<b>Congressional District:</b>	Representative Walden, District 2; Senators Wyden and Merkley
<b>Partners:</b>	True South Solar
<b>Demographics:</b>	Ashland, Oregon; population 20,078
<b>Impact:</b>	A consumer-owned, certified organic food cooperative in Ashland is reducing its carbon footprint and saving money on its utility bill through the adoption of solar energy.

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