

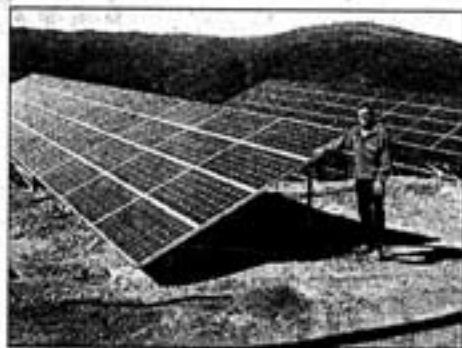
# More homeowners in state warming up to solar power

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The number of homes using the sun as a power source is expected to more than double this year as Connecticut embraces solar power technology in the face of higher energy costs.

Charlie Moret, managing director for the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, recently said there are 15 homes in Connecticut that get at least some power from solar energy systems and that 17 more are installing the equipment.

The 17 homeowners are taking advantage of a 5-month-old CCEF program that



Contributed photo

**Bank on it:** Jeffrey Patterson, owner of Mount Eden Vineyards in California, displays solar panel banks installed by Akeena Solar Inc., which installs such systems in Connecticut.

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## Solar power heats up in state

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will cover half the cost — up to \$25,000 — of installing a system.

CCEF also added \$9 million to the fund that helps businesses adopt solar technology, but that program hasn't seen the same surge in interest as the one for residents.

Experts in the solar power industry said higher energy costs caused by rising prices for oil and natural gas are prompting more interest in solar energy and other renewable sources. Oil- and gas-fired power plants dominate the U.S. electricity market, and as their fuel costs increase the price for energy goes up, according to several reports issued by Connecticut utility companies United Illuminating and Connecticut Light & Power.

But experts say economic concerns aren't the only issues driving the market. Connecticut residents want to create a system that belongs in the 21st century and doesn't pollute.

Everett Barber, president of Guilford-based Sunsearch Inc., said he is getting three or four calls a day from people interested in new systems. He said he is not pursuing the business aggressively because he wants people to understand that the economics behind the

systems aren't very strong. It will take about 40 years to recover the cost of installing a solar power system, even with the CCEF subsidy, he said.

Barber said a \$30,000 system can provide about 40 percent of the electricity an average family consumes a year and trim the monthly utility bill by \$22. At that rate, it would take about 37 years to recover the cost, he said. Other incentives might reduce the recovery time to 24 years, he said.

"I ask people why they want to do this," he said.

If they're only looking to save money, a solar power system that generates electricity might not be the best way to go, he said. Instead, people might want to look at solar water, pool or house-heating systems, Barber said. There is no subsidy under the CCEF program for these systems, he said, but the costs of installing them can typically be recovered much more quickly.

According to CCEF, the solar power systems people are installing include solar panels, usually mounted on a roof, and a converter to change the direct current electricity created by such panels into usable alternating currents for homes. They also must be able to send extra electricity into the grid and

store that electricity in banks of batteries for future use.

The good news is that all of these systems tend to increase a home's resale value, Barber said.

He said most people want the systems because they like the technology or because they want to use a power source that doesn't pollute.

Solar energy does not create the pollutants that come from power-generating facilities that use coal or oil to create electricity.

Barry Cinnamon, president of New Jersey-based Akeena Solar Inc., disagreed with Barber on the system's economics. He said that as prices for electricity increase, solar power systems would pay for themselves more quickly. He also said subsidies under renewable energy credit, or "green tag" programs, will become more common and further defray the costs of systems. Under these programs, companies will pay people to produce energy from the sun, wind or other renewable sources, he said.

*For more information on solar technology programs, visit [www.ctcleanenergy.com](http://www.ctcleanenergy.com), or call the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund at (860) 563-0015.*