

Envirothink

Utility company's bee hives and solar garden produces sweet results

Posted on August 10, 2017 by Envirothink

As the prices drop for solar panels, solar has gained incredible popularity over the past few years. From home use to huge commercial arrays, solar has become a fixture in the American landscape for green energy.



Utility companies have jumped on the solar bandwagon. Solar is increasingly becoming a part of utility companies portfolio and strategic plan. Minnesota's largest member-owned electric cooperative,

Connexus Energy's solar garden produces both renewable energy and honey!

Connexus Energy (<https://www.connexusenergy.com/residential/>), has gone one further. It's created a first-of-its-kind solar garden (<http://www.startribune.com/ramsey-energy-company-shoots-for-gooey-gold-beneath-its-solar-array/420790913/>) that not only produces energy but honey as well.

The company's pollinator-friendly solar array encompasses wildflowers and features 15 beehives that have been managed and expanded during the summer. The flowers provide much-needed food for the pollinators who have been suffering from severe loss of habitat and pesticide use across the country.

"It's a perfect pairing," said Marla Spivak, a renowned bee researcher at the University of Minnesota. "You have the solar energy efficiency and then you have pollinator habitat. What could be better?"

Samantha Neral, a Connexus Energy spokesperson, said "following Minnesota's adoption of a law and statewide standard for pollinator-friendly solar (the country's first such statewide standards, passed in 2016), our array was evaluated and scored well above the level required to call it 'exemplary pollinator

habitat.' To us, bee hives at a pollinator-friendly solar garden seem like the natural next step."

Travis and Chiara Bolton of Bolton Bees, a first-generation business, breed Minnesota-hardy queen bees in addition to producing a line of distinct, location-specific honey that is sold to select restaurants and retailers.



SolarWise Honey will be harvested and marketed this Fall, thanks to Bolton Bees

"We carefully select properties throughout Minnesota for our apiaries. With its abundance of pollinator-friendly flowers, the Connexus solar garden is the perfect environment for a healthy bee location," they said.

A Minnesota nonprofit made the initial introduction between Bolton Bees and Connexus Energy.

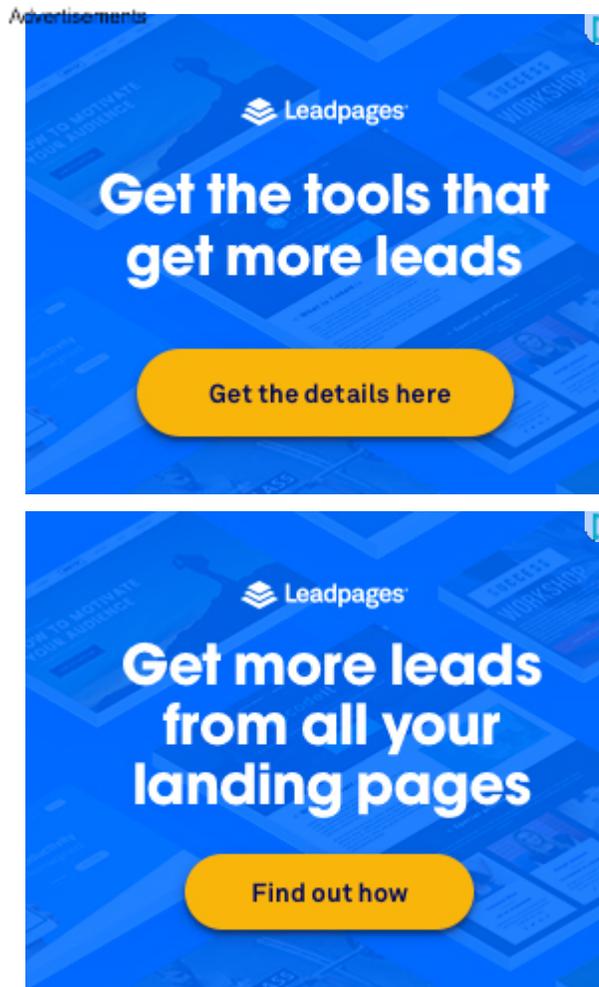
Fresh Energy's Rob Davis said "Connexus Energy's project is a shining example of what a solar site can and should be. Nationwide, many communities are interested in ensuring the productive use of farm and rural lands. Connexus Energy's bird- and pollinator-friendly solar array shows that solar sites can be designed and managed in ways that have numerous agricultural and environmental benefits."

Maryland recently passed standards modeled on Minnesota's, and pollinator-friendly solar projects are now being pitched or built in states like Wisconsin, Iowa and Vermont.

This Fall the honey produced at Connexus Energy's site will be harvested. A portion of the honey will be named SolarWise Honey after Connexus Energy's successful community solar garden program and will be given to solar garden subscribers and donated to local community fundraising events.



Bolton Bees, which is in the process of becoming a B Corp (<http://bit.ly/2vr7Xn4>), has registered a Federal Trademark (Serial # 87406579) for Solar Honey™. to help establish an industry standard for honey produced on or adjacent to solar arrays, They intend for the trademark to be available to all honey producers, electric cooperatives, food companies, and solar businesses willing to agree to the production standard.



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