

Press Release

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Tenesol builds 7 MWp PV system on 188 farm buildings – benefits owners and region



Tenesol, the global solar power provider owned by energy giants TOTAL and EDF, has completed a €34 million rooftop PV system spread across 188 agricultural buildings belonging to 109 individual farmers. Located in Ségala-Limargue, south-west France, the turnkey system demonstrates the economic benefits that PV technology can bring to both building owners and a local region. The system is the product of 18 months work between Sicaseli, an association of farmers, and Tenesol. With a 6.9 MWp capacity, the installation is one of the largest collective energy developments in France.

Delivered on a turnkey basis, the rooftop system covers 52,500 m² and incorporates 31,000 of Tenesol's advanced PV modules, which were manufactured at the company's plant in nearby Toulouse. The system is capable of producing 7.2 MWh of electricity per year – the equivalent annual consumption of around 2,000 households – and is expected to deliver average annual revenues of €1.2 million over 20 years.

“The economic impact of this project on both the farmers and region has been very significant,” says Laurent Causse, head of the energy department at Sicaseli. “By taking on an additional role as an energy producer, farmers can expect to earn significant revenue while the region benefits from investment and economic development as a result of the net profit this program generates. This project is a great example of how farming communities and renewable energy can work together to benefit all.”

The project was inaugurated at the end of October 2010 at an event attended by Benoit Rolland, Managing Director of Tenesol, Pierre Lafragette, CEO of Sicaseli, and Martin Malvy, president of the Midi-Pyrenees region. In addition, numerous local government officials and stakeholders attended as well as many of the farmers who are involved.

Farming for solar

Sicaseli is located in the south-west France region of Lot. The organisation, which has over 560 members, is committed to rural development and the preservation of the local landscape. Installing a large solar power development was a perfect fit with the association's goals. "We were examining ways of combining agriculture and ecology for the benefit of sustainable development," explains Laurent Causse.

Sicaseli's feasibility study into solar power lasted several months with 10 solar companies invited to tender for a new project. Tenesol was awarded the contract based on its size, history, extensive experience and high quality but cost effective PV panels. The fact that Tenesol is the largest PV manufacturer in France was also a reason for its choice as it offered obvious environmental benefits in regard to transporting the solar panels to the job.

Testing times

After winning the contract, Tenesol undertook a thorough evaluation of the region's PV potential. The company presented its findings to Sicaseli members and the response was enthusiastic. Around 270 farmers endorsed the idea and, after evaluating which buildings were suitable for a PV system, 109 signed on to take part.

Once the technical, legal, financial and urban planning regulations had been met, Tenesol was given the go-ahead. The company then began a technical feasibility audit on each of the 188 buildings to ensure their suitability and to specify the correct materials to create each PV installation. In September 2009 construction began.

Power building

Each of the 188 buildings is different and each presented its own unique challenges. For most buildings, the existing roof covering was removed and the support structure reinforced before the PV system was installed. The average build time for a 300m² system on the project was one week and around 25 different buildings were worked on at any one time by a mix of Tenesol and Sicaseli employees. The systems were carefully designed to blend into the local environment and to offer a seamless fit with the natural beauty of the Midi-Pyrenees region. The first installation was connected to the local electricity grid in December 2009.

In keeping with their values, Tenesol and Sicaseli hired local and regional contractors to handle work such as asbestos removal, carpentry and metalwork. All outside companies were evaluated following one or two pilot projects to ensure they met Tenesol's standards in terms of high quality output.

Money matters

To finance the project and offer a uniform representation on behalf of the 109 farmers, a dedicated joint-

stock company called Ségala Agriculture et Energie Solaire (SAES) was established. SAES allowed the farmers to work together and secure the most advantageous finance package. Ultimately a pool incorporating six different financial institutions gathered the €34 million required for the project.

To maximise the financial return of the project, the farmers were keen to take responsibility for the maintenance of the systems. Although Tenesol plays a supporting role and can answer any questions, all maintenance is handled by Sicaseli.

“The Sicaseli project is a perfect example of how the farming community can act collectively to produce a large-scale PV system that not only benefits those involved but an entire region,” concludes Benoit Rolland, CEO of Tenesol.

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About Tenesol

A rapidly expanding global player in the field of solar energy (*with a turnover of €249 million in 2009, +29%*), Tenesol works on behalf of businesses, local authorities and private individuals. For more than 26 years, Tenesol has been engineering, designing, manufacturing, installing and managing solar energy systems including production and consumption of supplied systems (*Off-grid sites, general grid supply via direct connection, solar water heating*) for its customers around the globe. A benchmark player in its sector, Tenesol currently has a staff of over 1,100 across 20 subsidiaries including two production facilities.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.tenesol.com/?lang=en>

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