

All that glitters might be gold

We are all now well used to seeing adverts for all manner of renewable technologies. At the same time the papers are filled with doom and gloom about the excessive profits of the large energy producers. There has also been a lot of coverage surrounding the reduction of the Feed in Tariff incentive for solar farms. It can be a confusing topic knowing which route to pick and which company to appoint. There is one simple way however to pick through the chaff and find an attractive solution from a reliable provider using proven robust materials.

Most people are not aware that solar PV (solar photovoltaics for generating electricity) is still incredibly attractive and profitable for farmers. It can add an excellent source of revenue without any additional workload. The system does not need to utilise existing roofs of grain stores or barns and can instead be erected on the ground.

A typical small-scale solar farm system would need less than half an acre of space and would generate an annual income in excess of £17,000 for 25 years! That is a 25 year value exceeding £425,000. Such a system would cost about £120,000 from a premium German manufacturer. These ground mounted PV arrays require very little maintenance and carry very long warranties from their manufacturers.

There are two catches however: you will need to fund your own PV system. Most banks however will lend for solar PV projects at an average rate of around 5% pa. When you compare this to the average return on investment from the solar PV system of 14-15% you can see why solar farming is still very attractive. The second catch is the time left to take advantage of the current scheme. The current Feed In Tariff rate is only available until April 2012. You need to have our system fully installed by that date to guarantee the higher rate of Feed in Tariff for the next 25 years.

It is worth noting that some companies offer 'free' solar PV systems if you sign up to a 25 year lease, but the big catch is that you only get the electricity which is worth anything from £10 per month. Not a very attractive proposition when you can buy your own mini solar farm and make your own profit.

It is still possible to start a new project now and qualify for the higher rate tariff. Planning permissions are usually very straightforward and usually take between 2-10 weeks depending on your location. Approvals from your local network operator (the national grid) can take 8-10 weeks. Smaller solar PV system can actually be installed after only a few weeks without any prior approvals.

It is easy to see why now is the time to act to secure this fleeting opportunity. If you think this sounds like an attractive opportunity and you would like some straightforward advice you can contact Freewatt Ltd based in rural Lincolnshire. Freewatt benefits from being one of the most experienced installers of solar PV in the UK. Freewatt has the experience of not only installing over 300 installations for their customers but they have also installed their own 10 acre solar farm at their office near Lincoln. They offer a start to finish 'turn-key- service ensuring a successful project delivery.

For more information you can contact Freewatt at:

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Pictures: ground mount 50kW and barn with 30kW.