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Woodstock Aqueduct Co. advances energy leadership with new solar tracker orchard

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Operating in its third century, the Woodstock Aqueduct Company has a long history of providing reliable water service to its village and local customers. Now, the private regulated utility founded in 1886 has chosen innovative solar technology to keep competitive and improve its sustainability.

Woodstock Aqueduct has installed a 14 solar tracker, 60kW orchard near its main pump house. Woodstock Aqueduct's largest utility expense is pumping water and it regularly amassed utility bills that are close to \$2,000 per month.

"If we are going to be responsible for our energy use we need to invest in and support energy sources consistent with our need to maintain and enhance the quality of our natural resources. What better choice can a water company make than clean, renewable solar power," said Eric Wegner, vice president and general manager with Woodstock Aqueduct. "We had originally priced out fixed solar at our site, but AllSun solar trackers made the finances work. So we went with it."

The company was one of the first utilities in the state to take advantage of the then newly created Efficiency Vermont incentives to install variable frequency drives on their well pump motors, significantly reducing both their demand and electric usage.

The new solar orchard includes 14 AllSun Trackers manufactured locally by AllEarth Renewables of Williston, which use innovative GPS and wireless technology to follow the sun throughout the day to boost solar energy production by up to 45% over roof-top installations. The ground-mounted solar systems are designed for homes, businesses, non-profits, and commercial-scale installations. The project will provide an estimated 82,320 kWh of solar energy to the utility.

Woodstock Aqueduct, a regulated utility, chose to finance the project using a 5 year Power Purchase Agreement. This agreement allowed the utility "to prove the finances work and make the case before regulators that this is good for ratepayers," said Wegner. "If you can make it a good deal for your customers and the environment why wouldn't you do it?"

The Aqueduct Co. is no stranger to conservation and educational initiatives. The utility has 360 acres of forestland surrounding their reservoir in the state's Current Use Program for active land management. When the forestry class at nearby Woodstock Union High School lost their land for teaching demonstrations the company offered the use of its land. As local students gain knowledge about forest management and where their water comes from, the new solar trackers will provide a new learning opportunity for students, hopes the Aqueduct Co.

"This project is another great example of using solar to both improve the bottom line for a business, while enhancing the company's mission and providing educational benefits for the public," said David Blittersdorf, CEO of AllEarth Renewables.