

# Solar Power Cuts Irrigation Costs

Setting up a solar array in an irrigated field is catching on as a way to reduce electric costs. Michael Shonka is putting in systems in Nebraska and surrounding states. He has worked with solar energy for 30 years and says there has never been a better time to go solar.

“Solar power has become much more cost effective in the past 10 years,” says Shonka. “The farmers putting these systems in don’t power the wellhead or the pivot directly. Instead, they produce energy all year round and then draw down earned credits when they start pumping water.”

Shonka points to the first solar system he put in an irrigated field. Although only a 25 kW system, it produced 40 kW hours in the first year, which was about 13 percent above what was expected.

“The past few years have been wetter than normal, and the typical farmer with solar has received a check at the end of the year,” says Shonka.

Shonka notes that irrigators using electric power for their rigs already have a power line in place so it’s easy to connect to the solar array. When siting panels, he places them at field edges to minimize the impact on production.

He expects demand to increase if commodity prices increase. At this point there are fewer farmers who can use a tax credit



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or depreciation. However, the cost of photovoltaic solar has never been better.

“Prices have come down considerably,” he says. “A 25 kW array cost \$75,000 when it was put up a few years ago,” he recalls. “Today it would be \$60,000 before tax credits or other incentives.”

He points out that current tax credits are good through 2018. They decrease by 5

percent each year after that and end in 2020.

“Those who bought early are still coming out ahead, even with the higher installation prices,” says Shonka.

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## Feed-Saving Bulk Bin

“Our new Series 45 feed bin is built from a one-piece rotational molded tank and stands on a strong steel frame with fork pockets. It lets smaller producers save money by purchasing feed in bulk and results in less feed loss due to rodents,” says Tom Campbell, Richfield Industries, South Flint, Mich.

The 45-bu. bin stands 85 in. tall, 48 in. wide, and 54 in. deep making it small enough to fit in back of your pickup. It comes with a one-piece stand, a weather-tight lid, and a 9-in. grain door. A stainless steel chute below the door is designed to feed into a standard 5-gal. pail.

Many options for the bin are available,

including a 2-piece stand that allows additional containers to be stacked while grinding feed or having feed delivered. Custom base heights can also be fabricated.

The Series 45 with a one-piece stand sells for \$1,750 and is available from any Do It Best hardware store.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tom Campbell, Richfield Industries, 3020 Airpark Dr., South Flint, Mich. 48507 (ph 810 233-0440; extension 1253 or fax 810 767-5637; www.agcontainer.com; Orders@Agcontainer.com).

**Built from a one-piece rotational molded tank, Richfield Industries’ 45-bu. bin is small enough to fit in back of a pickup.**

