FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2024

SolarShare Wisconsin Cooperative Wins Phase Two “Energizing Rural Communities” Prize

Lake Hallie, WI — SolarShare Wisconsin Cooperative was one of 33 organizations nationally that won $200,000 from the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Energizing Rural Communities Prize. The cooperative plans to use these funds to continue providing opportunities for Wisconsinites to invest in local community scale solar projects. In 2023, SolarShare won $100,000 in the Phase One Energizing Rural Communities competition. The phase one funds were used for capacity building within the state, allowing the cooperative to hire an intern and to expand its member base across the state with multiple statewide information campaigns.

In the second phase of the prize competition, SolarShare focused on its third community scale project located near Lake Hallie, Wisconsin, with support from DOE’s Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, the National Renewable Energy Lab, and power connectors in the American Made Challenges network. Shortly after winning the Phase 1 Energizing Rural Communities competition, SolarShare closed on a property near Lake Hallie, purchasing the land from local farmers Larry and Diane Marquardt. Larry and Diane became members of the cooperative, with Larry joining the board in early 2024. SolarShare member contractor One Energy Renewables is developing a 5 megawatt (MW) solar project on this land, which is slated to finish construction later this year.

In its prize application, SolarShare worked with the Chippewa Falls School District and Wisconsin’s K-12 Energy Education Program (KEEP) to lay the groundwork for an innovative new program, with a portion of the funding earmarked to support the development of the nation’s first K-12 agrivoltaics curriculum. The cooperative also has a goal to help local farmers access land near its projects, with early plans to work with the Wisconsin Farmers Union to support its Local Foods Access Program (LFAP). LFAP pays market farmers to grow wholesale produce to support local food pantries. In this case, SolarShare is looking to help new farmers lease land near the solar project.

“The prize winnings from the Energizing Rural Communities grants are an opportunity for our members to create a lot of wins for the local community and working with KEEP, we believe that this money will have a statewide impact for many years to come. Whether that be through supporting local schools or helping others fill up the local food pantries with fresh, locally grown foods, we are here to help. Cooperatives are created to serve their members, but they also provide multiple tangible benefits to the community” said SolarShare Executive Director Cory Neeley.

On Wednesday, September 25, Neeley will be joining other rural Wisconsin advocates at the “Investing in Rural Wisconsin” roundtable hosted by the Wisconsin Farmers Union and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Chief Agricultural Negotiator Ambassador Doug McKalip and White House Domestic Policy Advisor Neera Tanden will be at this event, which focuses on the recent federal funding investments in rural Wisconsin. Neeley will highlight the phase one and two prize competition funding at this event, citing the impact of these funds for the cooperative and the local communities.

*About SolarShare WI Cooperative*

*SolarShare WI Cooperative democratizes clean energy investment in Wisconsin. Headquartered in Madison, WI, the cooperative was formed in 2021 to help grow Wisconsin's solar industry while allowing residents and businesses from the state to invest in community-scale solar projects. To date, the cooperative has raised over $1M to support three solar projects. The cooperative's membership includes member investors and member contractors from across the state working together to build a brighter future for ALL in Wisconsin. For more information on SolarShare WI Cooperative, visit solarshare.coop.*

*Learn more about this prize and other winners at*

*americanmadechallenges.org/challenges/rural-energy*

*Media Contact:*

*Cory Neeley*

*Executive Director*

*608-358-3852*

*cory@solarshare.coop*

[*www.solarshare.coop*](http://www.solarshare.coop)