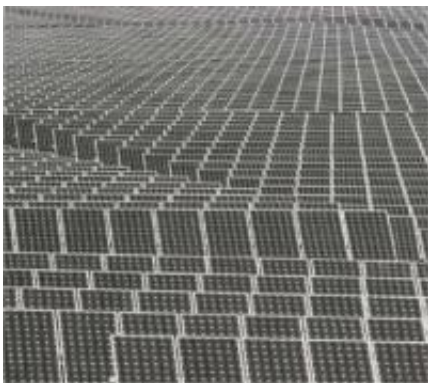


Will China's Planned Solar Field Lower the Cost of Alternative Energy?

September 14 2009, by Miranda Marquit



Panels from a solar farm in Spain. This solar farm will not be the largest when China's solar field opens. Image source: Treehugger.com

(PhysOrg.com) -- One of the biggest complaints that some have about solar power (and other forms of alternative energy) is that it is so much more expensive than the fossil fuels that are more commonly used today. However, this might change with China's ambitious plans to build a 2-gigawatt solar field in Inner Mogolia.

The solar field will be built by the U.S. company First Solar, and it is not scheduled to be completed for another 10 years, in 2019. The massive undertaking, though, could help make [solar power](#) more competitive in terms of energy pricing. [MarketWatch reports](#) on the project, and its possible implications:

The project "represents an encouraging step forward toward the mass-scale deployment of solar power worldwide to help mitigate [climate-change](#) concerns," First Solar Chief Executive Mike Ahearn said in a statement.

The project will depend upon a "feed-in-tariff" supplied by the Chinese government, which will guarantee the pricing of the electricity it produces over a certain period, First Solar said.

"This type of forward-looking government policy is necessary to create a strong solar market ... which in turn continues to drive the cost of solar electricity closer to 'grid parity' -- where it is competitive with traditional energy sources," Ahearn said.

While many are not as impressed with the idea of climate change concerns, the idea of more affordable solar power appeals on another level. Being able to develop energy sources beyond [fossil fuels](#), which will eventually run out and are located to large extent in countries of questionable stability, would contribute to energy security. [China](#) also recognizes that it will need more energy as it moves forward in its efforts to become the next economic superpower. Fossil fuels will probably prove inadequate, so China is taking the time now to develop energy source for the future.

In the end, much of what is lacking in terms of alternative [energy](#) development and mass use is the political and financial will to front the money needed to give it a start. China is hoping that by providing political and financial capital it will be able to jump start a move toward increasingly affordable solar power.

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