

# Sun shines on New York solar energy boom

February 23 2014, by Brigitte Dusseau

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The rooftop of Jetro Restaurant Depot in the Bronx, with a view of Manhattan in the distance, is covered with solar panels on January 17, 2014 in New York

On a rooftop in the Bronx far from the skyscrapers of Manhattan, 4,760 panels soak up the winter rays. Welcome to the solar power boom in New York state.

Robert Kline, director of commercial sales for the Ross Solar Group that installed the panels, is delighted.

"It is the largest (solar) installation in the history of New York City," he

tells AFP.

The 1.6-megawatt installation on the Jetro Cash and Carry has been proudly singled out by New York governor Andrew Cuomo as a prime example of a drive to haul the state into a new dawn.

New York has long lagged behind California and even neighboring states, let alone Europe, when it comes to generating solar energy, but that is slowly changing.

In 2012, Cuomo set up the public-private NY-Sun Initiative with \$800 million, and 300 megawatts of solar capacity have since been installed in the state, more than during the previous 10 years.

Cuomo now wants to extend the program until 2023 with an additional nearly \$1 billion to generate another 3,000 megawatts.

Experts say that would create 13,000 jobs and bring down greenhouse emissions by 2.3 million tonnes a year.

California and Arizona are home to more than 80 percent of solar installations in the United States, but Cory Honeyman—a solar analyst at GTM Research—says New York is coming into its own.

"New York definitively is one of the hotter markets to watch, as we expect a really significant ramp up in build out of projects for both residential and non-residential markets," he said.

## **Public awareness on the rise**

This is a godsend for more than 400 specialized companies competing for their share of the ballooning market.

In the Bronx, one of them, OnForce Solar, saw its revenue triple last year and hopes to double it again this year, chief executive officer Charles Feit told AFP.

He says he has doubled, even tripled staff every year since he started and that it was the economic argument that was driving business home.

"Politically, the winds are with us... public awareness has definitely risen," said Feit at his large premises where several new offices are in the process of being built.

"In New York City, there is so much opportunity," agreed David Sandbank, OnForce president and vice president of the New York Solar Energy Industries Association.

While Manhattan is a problem due to strict regulations, other boroughs are full of huge rooftops and business owners looking to save on some of the highest electricity costs in the country.

Sandbank said the NY-Sun Initiative was intended to pave the way for a stable solar industry and said some specialist firms from California have now expanded to New York.

"With longevity and transparency, we're creating an industry," he told AFP, adding 3,300 new jobs had already been created.

Jetro Cash and Carry hopes to save 40 percent of their \$250,000 electricity bill a year, says Kline.

Contracts are pouring in and Cuomo recently promised grants to schools that build solar panels.

Former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg also announced last year

that a solar energy farm would be built in 2015 at Freshkills, a former landfill on Staten Island.

It is to be the largest solar farm in New York, capable of producing 10 megawatts of electricity.

But it's a long road ahead.

Solar energy represents one percent of renewable energy production in the United States, itself 12 percent of total electricity production, according to the Energy Information Administration.

The US [solar energy](#) market grew nearly 30 percent from 2012 to 2013 and Honeyman says it could overtake world leader Germany in terms of new builds in 2014 for the first time in 15 years.

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