



With a smart finance plan, serious incentives and an established solar contractor, two California dairymen have turned 4 acres of solar technology into a real cash cow.

STORY BY SABRA MORRIS /// PHOTOS BY JAMIE COLE

panels on Lakeside’s south-facing free stalls. Mike knew he was sitting on something big. He wondered if he could benefit from solar technology on his property—not as a landlord, but as a system owner.

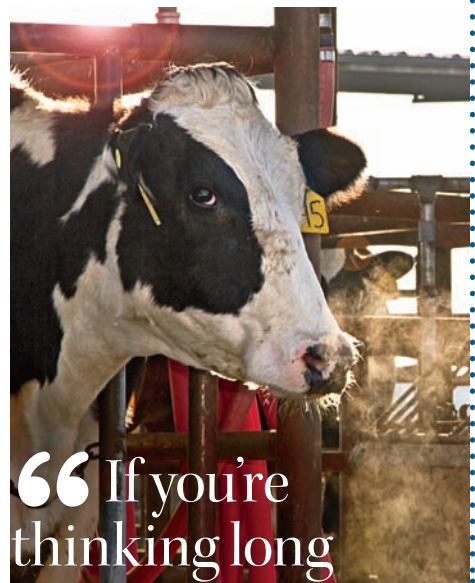
He and Manny were also trying to find ways to soften the financial blow of the economic downturn that rocked the dairy industry in 2009, plummeting the price paid to milk producers to far below the cost of production and putting many dairymen out of business.

Mike told his banker, Randy Irwin of Rabobank, about the offers he’d received from solar investors. It just so happened that Rabobank had recently started a green energy department and was putting together finance packages for solar agricultural projects. Irwin provided Mike with a list of recommended solar contractors to contact, one of which was Novato, California-based SPG Solar.

“They’d already done several ag installations,” says Mike. He toured a few, and one in particular stood out. It was a tomato plant whose system size and output would be similar to Lakeside’s. “I was just thoroughly impressed,” he says.

SPG also offered a 10-year system warranty, 25-year panel warranty and an energy output guarantee, which promised the Monteiros’ system would produce 1.7 million kilowatt hours (kWh) per year. “That provides peace of mind to the customer that they’re getting a guaranteed return on investment,” says Dylan Dupre of SPG Solar.

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“If you’re thinking long term about your business, reducing your operating costs and improving your bottom line, solar can be part of the equation.”

Opportunity Knocks

The solar PV array might just be the Monteiros’ best investment to date. “In 2008, I had several investors calling me from around the United States. They’d found that we were within a half mile of the PG&E [Pacific Gas & Electric Company] substation out here,” says Mike. “These investors were asking to buy or rent 100 acres of our land to build their own solar fields.”

A year later, a company from Spain came to the farm and offered to put solar