

Farm Managers Avoid Surcharges and Offset Energy Expenses with Peak Energy Agriculture Rewards (PEAR)



West Hills Farm Services uses the Infinity System from Peak Energy Agriculture Rewards (PEAR) to earn cash incentives and control pumps year round, especially during critical peak demand events.

AT A GLANCE

Organization: West Hills Farm Services

Contact: Brad Gleason

Pump Partner: Westside Pump

Crops: Pistachios & Almonds

Service Points: 2 wells - 250 hp pumps

Equipment: Infinity System

Equipment Value: \$43,050

Annual Incentive Potential: \$9,500*

Total PEAR Value: \$52,550

Challenge

Over his 25 years in farming, Brad Gleason has learned that success comes from optimizing efficiency and minimizing costs.

Gleason and his business partner, Gregorio Jacobo, manage about 7,000 acres of pistachio and almond orchards through their company, West Hills Farm Services. For them, the old adage is wrong: money does grow on trees. So they carefully monitor the

productivity of the trees and closely manage expenses. While Gleason and Jacobo continually make improvements to optimize yields, farming expenses continue to mount at an unnerving rate.

“Success in agriculture these days is a matter of containing and reducing costs,” says Gleason. “Productivity gains are incremental, and rising expenses are always a threat. So we’re constantly looking for ways to get more

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efficient. Technology advances can make a big difference.”

Meantime, PG&E is planning to begin a new pricing program for large agriculture customers starting February 1, 2011. The Peak Day Pricing (PDP) program includes both rate incentives and surcharges. The surcharges will be a \$1 per kilowatt-hour penalty for using electricity during critical peak demand periods. For many Ag customers, this will mean a 10-times increase over standard rates.



Brad Gleason said West Hills Farm Services participated in seven critical demand events in 2010. “Like clockwork, the pumps turned off and we started earning incentive dollars.”

Solution

Gleason enrolled two 250-horsepower irrigation pumps in the Peak Energy Agriculture Rewards (PEAR) program last spring. He says the enrollment process was, “painless and the paperwork was simple and easy to understand.”

His operation was notified of seven critical peak demand events last summer, and he was given the choice whether to participate or opt out. Choosing to participate in all events, Brad used the PEAR Web site to opt in to the events, which ranged from two to four hours in duration. Just before the start of each event, PEAR’s network operations center sent a shutdown signal to Gleason’s pumps through the wireless network.

“Like clockwork, the pumps turned off and we started earning incentive dollars,” he explains. “The system gives you a choice whether to restart the pumps remotely or do it manually. We chose manual operation. So after each event was over, I received both a voice message and an e-mail notification. We restarted the pumps and resumed our watering schedule.”

Gleason says he is especially pleased with, “the added value in the soil moisture monitoring and going online to see how the wells are running.” With investments of \$400,000 to \$900,000 per deep well, he emphasized the importance of using the PEAR equipment to assess pump efficiencies and being able to anticipate any needed repairs before a well goes down with a big, expensive problem.

Best of all, Gleason says he’s reassured that his two large wells will be sheltered from any surcharges related to PG&E’s new PDP pricing plan.

Summary of Benefits

Peak Energy Agriculture Rewards (PEAR) is a free program that pays cash incentives for reducing energy usage during critical peak demand periods.

For qualified Ag customers, the program also provides thousands of dollars in Web-to-wireless monitoring and control equipment at no cost.

This equipment gives year-round visibility to critical information, such as pump on/off status, pump efficiency, soil moisture, temperature, and other data.

In addition, enrollment in the PEAR program shelters PG&E customers from PDP surcharges.



With free monitoring and control equipment, Gregorio gets an additional source of valuable information about the health of their orchards.

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