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December 29th, 2015 – A new type of farm is sprouting up in the Finger Lakes!

A brand new farm opened in Tompkins County this week, and local residents will reap the benefits of the harvest right away. But the crop might not be what you expect – it requires no water, no soil, and no seeds, only sunshine to produce its yield, which it does 365 days a year.

What's the crop? Solar Panels.

What's the yield? Hundreds of thousands of kilowatt hours of clean electricity every year.

In dozens of neatly spaced rows, tucked away on a vacant lot in west of Ithaca, the future of renewable energy in New York is quietly growing. Thanks to evolving laws surrounding the adoption of solar, local residents can now harvest solar energy from remotely located solar farms just like the one off Route 79.

For years people could only consider going solar if they owned their home and their site was ideal, which effectively locked out 80 percent of the population from being able to make that choice. Now laws have changed and Tompkins County is leading the way toward what may be the biggest thing that's ever happened to solar in New York.

Similar to the community supported agriculture model, or CSA, where multiple members come together to receive the fruits and vegetables of one farm, Renovus Solar's new solar farm model allows individual people to purchase solar located on one central solar farm. Each person receives credits produced from their system on their electric bill just like they would if the solar was on their roof, just without the roof. This changes everything. Renters can go solar. People with non viable solar sites can go solar. People who live in apartments can now go solar.

In short, this is big. In the wake of Governor Cuomo's mandate that New York produce half of its power through clean, renewable resources, and a resounding call from the world's leaders to address climate change, many local residents have come together in an effort to expand the reach of solar energy in our region. Through all of their efforts, farms like this are set to start popping up throughout the region, flooding the utility grid with the clean energy that everyone is seeking.

The first farm will be completed by year end, with the next two already nearly full and scheduled for construction in early 2016. These farms are a victory for solar policy in New York, and for all of the individuals and communities who share the purpose of a clean energy future.

Solar energy is effectively an infinite resource, and by unlocking that resource through farms just like this one, we are all one step closer to a cleaner future and true energy independence.