

# Martha Staskus: A Renewable Jobs Future in Vermont

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Vermont is poised at a watershed moment in our history. Already recognized for our ingenuity and innovation, we have the potential to lead the nation in renewable energy—creating jobs and the added value of fostering a sustainable local [industry](#).

## **Q. What advantages does Vermont already enjoy?**

We are already home to many leading renewable energy and energy efficiency manufacturers, distributors and installers, creating local jobs and building our energy future. [Businesses](#) like groSolar, Elemental Energy, Independent Power, AllEarth Renewables, and Alteris Renewables are together creating and installing renewable energy systems across the state thanks to supportive policies enacted by our Vermont Legislature. Other businesses like Northern Power Systems are manufacturing wind turbines, while NRG Systems remains a global leader in wind resource measurement equipment.

## **Q. Is there a political will for further improvement?**

Increasing Vermont's ability to produce clean, local, reliable energy from renewable sources is a win-win for our environment and local economy. Through polls and surveys, Vermonters have again and again voiced a clear desire for in-state, renewable energy. Local [power](#) generation is consistent with the long tradition found throughout our working landscape. We get it. Renewable energy is a good fit for Vermont values, combining pride of place with ecological convictions and economic prosperity.

## **Q. Has the recession trimmed expectations?**

In the face of a tough economic climate, this past year saw significant progress for renewable energy in Vermont. Among the many highlights: the

Ferrisburgh Solar Farm began producing energy as the first major solar project developed under the 2009 Standard Offer Program. VPIRG launched an innovative Solar Communities initiative. Proposed wind projects in Lowell and Georgia/Milton received local and state support. The city of Montpelier moved forward on plans for its biomass district heating plant. AllEarth Renewables was named Vermont's fastest growing company of the past five years. Vermonters accomplished all of this despite facing dismal economic news around the region and globe.

**Q. Specifically, what can we put on the Vermont Legislature's front burner this year?**

- Secure the funding of the [Clean Energy](#) Development Fund and maintain the viability of the Small Scale Solar and Wind Program.
- Expand the state's successful net-metering program with increased capacity of net-metered electric installations, and streamlined administration of group net metering for homeowners, schools, towns, non-profits, and businesses.
- Expand a value adder initiative similar to the successful SolarGMP program to all in-state utilities, adding valuable distributed production capacity.
- Implement a sales tax exemption on all high [efficiency](#) hydronic biomass equipment and waive the fuel excise tax on made-in-Vermont biofuels.
- Improve our Standard Offer Program by increasing the amount and size of eligible wind and solar projects. This program has jump-started Vermont's solar and wind industries and can be stronger.
- Fully fund the Vermont Solar Tax Credit for businesses whose initiatives were unexpectedly capped in June 2010. If fully funded, the potential for \$3 billion worth of Vermont economic activity could occur.
- Increase Efficiency Vermont funding to help expand efficiency measures,

thereby [saving](#) Vermonters money on their monthly energy bills.

- Update permitting of commercial-scale renewable energy to make the review process more effective and [efficient](#) for all parties.

Vermont's renewable energy future is bright. Together with the guidance of Vermont's Legislature we can continue to create policies that put good minds to work, create well-paying local jobs, and have a source of home-grown energy we can count on for generations to come.

*Martha Staskus is the board chair of Renewable Energy Vermont, a trade association representing nearly 300 businesses, individuals, colleges and others committed to reducing reliance on fossil fuels and expanding the availability of sustainable sources of energy in Vermont. She is vice president at Vermont Environmental Research Associates.*

**Learn more:**

Renewable Energy Vermont: [www.revermont.org](http://www.revermont.org)

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/article/20110123/LIVING09/101230310/Martha-Staskus-A-Renewable-Jobs-Future-in-Vermont>