

As sustainability becomes an increasingly important topic within the fresh produce industry, the Produce Marketing Association ([PMA](#)) hosted a webinar to hear from industry members on how they have addressed energy consumption within their businesses.

There are many ways to become more sustainable as a business, and now more than ever there is a push for long-term, renewable practices to be implemented and used throughout the industry.

The PMA Sustainability Webinar featured Nelson Longenecker of Four Seasons Produce, Jim Leimkuhler of Progressive Produce and Nicole Flewell of Taylor Farms; and was moderated by Ed Treacy from PMA.

The panelists shared how they have implemented solutions to reduce their energy consumption and energy costs by giving real-world examples.

Four Seasons Produce which owns the first warehouse in the country to be given an energy star, began their first project in 2018 of installing a 1.3-megawatt solar array on the roof, which now produces about one-sixth of the company's electricity in 24 hours.

The second project involved improving the refrigeration system including upgrading sensors, controls and changes in defrost cycles.

The savings in recommissioning the refrigeration system exceeded the savings from the solar project, according to Longenecker.

Though, "gains on our capacity reduction are each within the range of 80 to 100 thousand dollars per year," he said.

"Using energy carefully and eliminating waste is consistent with our commitment to continuous improvement and it makes us more competitive, as the most successful companies are learning how to do this."

Progressive Produce also took to refrigeration systems to find energy-saving solutions.

The company partnered with NRM, which installed a user-friendly refrigeration control system that is now being used at the two warehouse locations.

The system, "simplifies things, allows our operations to run more smoothly and it holds accountability around managing refrigeration and cold storage operations", Leimkuhler said.

The savings at both locations combined are about 547,000 kilowatt-hours, US\$ 82,000 annual savings, with a 60 percent return on investment and 386 MT of carbon dioxide.

“We have saved over half a million dollars over 10 years just in energy savings,” Leimkuhler said.

“Among the benefits of the system is lower fan time, a quieter environment, less product dehydration and remote system supervision which makes responses and corrective actions quicker.”

Taylor Farms has six solar installations across the country, a wind turbine, two fuel cells and a cogeneration plan within their sustainability practices.

“We have started to bundle these operations together so we have multiple assets at one site,” Flewell said.

Flewell talked about how the implementation of sustainable practices can be available to everyone by looking into capital purchase, power purchase agreements and funding opportunities.

“Investment in energy projects in other regions in North America can appear more challenging on the surface, but you just have to get creative!”

When asked about unexpected or “bonus benefits” from the projects undertaken, all three had something to add.

Longenecker said: “If you become more efficient with your refrigeration, you reduce your water tower usage, so your evaporative cooling water needs drop”.

Flewell contributed, saying the top benefits for the company have been the marketing piece to customers and consumers.

“It isn’t always about the dollars, it is what you are doing for the environment and people can all get on board, so I think it is a great message and an easy sell,” Leimkuhler said.

*Addressing the critical topic of water in the produce industry, the inaugural Agricultural Water Summit will take place in Chile this year. For more information, please visit [www.agwatersummit.com](http://www.agwatersummit.com).*