

Georgia Power to double purchase of solar energy

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Georgia Power is doubling the amount of solar energy it will buy from independent producers, the chairman of the state Public Service Commission announced Thursday.

Speaking to a conference of solar entrepreneurs, Chairman Lauren McDonald said the utility will buy another 2.5 megawatts of sun-made energy capacity from homes and businesses with solar panels, bringing its total purchases to just over 5 megawatts.

One megawatt has the capacity to power 250 homes or one Super Target. The company will pay 17 cents per kilowatt hour for the first 1.5 megawatts and take bids for the rest.

The announcement was a welcome bone to an industry that had tried and failed to get more business this spring.

The Georgia Solar Energy Association took part in a commission deliberation in hopes

of getting Georgia Power to both buy 2.5 more megawatts of solar power and collect the cost through ordinary rates, instead of through a premium-priced green power program.

They got neither.

Still, Georgia Power was buying only 500 kilowatts – half a megawatt – of independently produced solar power a year ago. The amount had jumped more than five-fold, even before Thursday's news. McDonald credited the industry's "youthful but cooperative" presence at the PSC for the growth.

In addition to the 5 megawatts Georgia Power will now buy through its solar energy program, it is also building 1 megawatt of solar capacity and will buy 1.4 megawatts through another program from two larger solar arrays. A solar project near Savannah will generate 1.2 megawatts. A solar array on a South Georgia pecan farm is producing 200 kilowatts.