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Ontario Farmers Sowing the Seeds of Renewable Energy

CHATHAM, ONTARIO, April 21, 2010 – Ontario farmers are sowing the seeds for a new crop this year as they prepare to participate in the Ontario government's homeowner Feed in Tariff program, known as "MicroFIT."

AGRIS Solar Co-operative which was launched less than a month ago, has already surpassed its minimum target of having 250 members committed to placing solar units on their properties.

"Farmers are the original environmental stewards," says Dave Malott, board president of AGRIS Solar Co-operative. "Our co-operative approach to the development of solar energy within the MicroFIT program in rural Ontario has created great interest and overwhelming support from the farming community" added Malott.

Following significant consultation with its membership, AGRIS Co-operative, a 1,200 member agricultural co-operative in southwestern Ontario, helped establish AGRIS Solar Co-operative. AGRIS saw an opportunity to adapt the traditional agricultural co-operative model as a vehicle for leadership, professional service and participation by farmers as members/owners.

Speaking at a Queen's Park reception hosted by the Ontario Co-operative Association, Chatham-Kent-Essex MPP Pat Hoy congratulated AGRIS Solar Co-operative on reaching this critical milestone so quickly. "By bringing leadership to Ontario farmers and facilitating participation in renewable energy AGRIS Solar has certainly found a receptive audience," says Hoy. "This innovative structure is exactly in-line with the spirit and intent of the MicroFIT program. It's exactly what the McGuinty government and the Green Energy Act sought to create, "growing" renewable energy in Ontario," Hoy added.

AGRIS Solar Co-operative is expected to have more than \$70 million in assets once the enrolment goal of 1,000 installations is reached. Members will be asked to contribute \$20,000 towards the capital cost of each installation of a solar module that is capable of generating up to 10 kilowatts of nameplate power. Members will sell the electrical power generated to Ontario Power Authority who is contractually obligated to purchase the power for a period of 20 years at a rate of \$0.802 per kilowatt-hour.

This new solar energy co-operative will operate in partnership with Spark Solar, an Ontario based developer of renewable energy projects. Spark Solar will provide the co-operative with the professional management required for the rapid installation of the solar units and ongoing business operations.

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