

A local urban farm now relies on solar energy for its electricity

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Chief p.v. tech John Freeman connects the wires from the solar panels together at Jacky King's Youth Karate KA Harvesting Earth Farm in Mount Morris Township on Monday afternoon. Jacky King started the urban farming project four years ago.

MT. MORRIS TOWNSHIP, Michigan — Jacky King took advantage of what the earth and sun had to offer when it came to powering his urban farm near Flint's northside.

Forty solar panels were up and running today at King's Youth Karate KA Harvesting Earth Farm, 1023 E. Princeton Ave. Later in the week geo-thermal technology will be added to the two 2,880-square-foot greenhouses.

"The earth is the biggest solar panel in the world," said King, who started the urban farming initiative with his wife, Dora, four years ago. "I believe in solar. That's why we call this Harvesting Earth. We don't give up anything."

In October Kettering University students were awarded a **\$50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation** to install the geo-thermal system powered by solar energy.

The solar power and the extra warmth to the greenhouses will bring the ability to farm more produce all year long, despite the cold, King said.

And the power from the sun will virtually eliminate an energy bill.

Currently electricity costs about \$15 a month for the farm, but with the geo-thermal technology that amount will be bumped up to about \$40 or \$50, said Scott Dosson, engineer for Mid Michigan Solar, which is heading up the project.

"The hope is that (the solar panels are) powering everything," he said.

In the summer the goal is to have the panels generating more power than the farm needs to make up for the drop of solar power in the winter, Dosson said.

After one year of using the panels, the farm would go on a net metering program. The program would cause King to make money in the summer off the extra energy being produced, and that would essentially cover the bills in the winter.

The 40 panels — totaling 55 feet in length — are set up 14 feet above the ground and held by a wooden frame behind one of the greenhouses. All the panels were donated at the beginning of December by Uni-Solar, a solar panel manufacturer based out of Auburn Hills.

Howard Croft, president and chief executive officer of Mid Michigan Solar, said finally getting the solar panels up and working after about a month isn't as exciting as the project itself and what can be done in the future.

"It is the beginning of the education in an area that needs it," said Croft, who has been interested in a project like this for awhile. "All we needed was the opportunity to know that there was someone (else) on board... We're doing this for the template to show people that this can be done."

The grant money will also be used for continuing research on the use of the solar power and geothermal energy. Kettering students will eventually have a website up and running to show results of the project, Croft said.



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Jacky King talk about the crops growing in the green house at his Youth Karate KA Harvesting Earth Farm in Mount Morris Township on Monday afternoon. "If my grandbaby don't eat it than I don't sell it, " King said.