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Renewable Energy Credits offered to GMC

By [Bryanna Allen](#)

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POULTNEY — Green Mountain College welcomes a new and unique form of solar energy to its campus as the installment of almost 600 panels was completed last week.

Aaron Kelly is a Vermont Law School student who collaborated with GMC about a year ago when he wanted to have a solar array installed on his property in Benson and give the Renewable Energy Credits to the college instead of selling them to out-of-state electrical companies.

The RECs are credits to a renewable energy source, such as a solar array.

However, more and more electrical companies must meet the requirements of a Renewable Energy Portfolio, meaning a designated percentage of their energy shares need to be renewable either through the construction or management of a renewable energy source or by purchasing the credits from another source or company to meet the standards.

People often sell their credits to make extra money, not knowing or caring that they are giving up the ability to call their renewable energy renewable.

“But by doing this, they are essentially giving up the claim that the system is renewable,” Kelly said. “This means that companies, mostly in other states, are getting the credit for being renewable.”

Kelly wanted to involve the college because he stands by and believes in the message that GMC promotes and because he believes selling the RECs is harmful for all parties involved.

“By selling the RECs, it’s supporting companies who are polluting the environment, giving them the claim to the renewable credits so that they can simply meet their requirements,” Kelly said.

Exactly 576 panels were installed on one acre of land in Benson last week.

Kelly and his family hired local installers and electricians to keep as much of the business end local. He made sure to use American-made panels and he had them installed 4 feet above the ground, something a bit unusual for most arrays.

“That way,” he said, “we can utilize the land to its fullest potential down the road.”

Kelly would like to eventually take advantage of the land agriculturally or by raising sheep.

“But that’s somewhere in the future,” he said.

Right now, it will not only serve Kelly and his family, but also will serve GMC.

The project will offset about 8 percent of the college’s electricity consumption on campus, or a total of roughly \$1,300 per year over the course of more than 20 years.

Aaron Witham, GMC’s sustainability coordinator, said this move will help the college take steps toward the goal of using 100 percent renewable energy by 2020.

“We firmly believe that retiring the credits instead of selling them is the best choice we could make in partnering with Aaron (Kelly),” he said. “It’s also a great chance to demonstrate to the students and public what GMC really stands for, instead of selling out.”

Kevin Jones, deputy director of the Institute for Energy and the Environment at the Vermont Law School, knows Kelly as a student and thinks what he and GMC are doing is remarkable.

“I don’t think that most people who get involved in solar community projects know that the RECs are usually sold and therefore still aiding in pollution and increased amounts of greenhouse gases,” Jones said.

Jones said people think they are reducing the carbon footprint by being a part of the solar movement, but once the credits are stripped and sold, they are no longer making a positive difference for the environment.

In fact, Jones said, they are supporting the growth of carbon emissions by selling the credits to companies who are not energy or environmentally efficient.

“Most people are just not educated about that aspect of it,” Jones said. “That should change. Keeping the credits bundled is exactly what everyone should be doing. GMC and Kelly are great examples of what is ethically correct.”

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