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Renewable energy eyes on Barbados

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A United States based energy company is desirous of starting business in Barbados, with the view of driving energy costs down for Barbadians in general and also the farming community.

Officials of that company, Megawatt Energy System (MES), concluded a five-day visit to the island on Saturday and have returned to Indianapolis, Indiana, optimistic that the initiatives they have pitched to a wide cross section of the farming community, Government and officials of the island's sole electricity company, will bear fruit soon.

MES was introduced to the idea of working in Barbados by local musician Michael 'Smasher' Cadogan, who now resides in Canada.

Mark Munley, Principal of MES told The Barbados Advocate on Friday, that the intention is to deploy renewable energy systems either in the form of solar or biogas to help bring control and stability to the grid and the decisions that both commercial entities and residents have to make regarding their energy costs.

Such systems, he suggested, would provide consumers with much needed control over their energy costs and ultimately their income. The Barbados Advocate understands that the intention is to offset all or a percentage of the farmers' energy costs first, then feed any excess energy that is produced into the existing power grid and as such, the opportunity could exist for consumers who go this route, to make additional income as feed-in tariff legislation is enacted.

"What solar provides is some stability and choice, and ultimately decisions will have to be made by residential, commercial, as well as larger industrial customers to make the plunge into solar and look long term, versus looking from week to week. There are some very good solutions that we have been able to present and so we have solicited tenders and bids to do work here," he said.

Munley added that his company is willing to partner with and train a local entity to appropriately deploy the systems. Additionally, he said that they will be rolling out an educational programme to push the idea of solar energy beyond the solar thermal solutions that locals are accustomed to. MES are experts in providing renewable energy for private residences and commercial properties throughout the United States.

"We are at a point where relative to the cost of energy, solar is at or below grid parity, so it is a very good time to deploy a renewable energy system, large or small. We can do a project that is one kilowatt to several megawatts in size, based on the partnerships that we have brought with us to help the nation," Munley said.

The MES official added, "Some of those projects could be residential applications for air conditioning; some could be the deployment of solar arrays on roof tops to minimise the expenditures for utility bills for shopping centres, or for farmers as part of their operations to control their costs so that they don't have to increase the cost of their produce or their operations and then have to move it down the supply chain to the end users."

He said that they would also like to expand their operations to other Caribbean countries and have so far had discussions in Haiti as part of the reconstruction efforts there. However, he said that their focus right now remains on Barbados, with the expectation that they can eventually branch out.

"Your grid is stable for the most part, you may have some isolated issues every couple years or so, but there is room for an alternative and we hope our presence is embraced. We bring a lot of resources, financial and intellectual to bear and can assist with a sphere that may not be familiar territory here. Hopefully, the utility will embrace us, because the customers want to have control. Our goal is to minimise out of pocket expense for Barbadians and to help rebuild the nation using green energy solutions," he explained.

The alternative energy expert further explained that solar together with bio-digestion would prove to be a great opportunity for livestock farming operations, as they have a ready supply of waste to be used. Munley has suggested that the farmers that embrace alternative energy will have the competitive advantage in the industry.

The idea is being wholeheartedly supported by the farming community through its representative body, the

Barbados Agricultural Society – which hosted and facilitated the MES officials during their visit. The general consensus is that the agricultural sub-sectors are willing and ready to get on board, once the green light is given.

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