



Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.
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Federal grant promises affordable clean energy for SSVEC

A \$485 million grant secured by the primary power provider for Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) will assure members affordable clean energy while maintaining service reliability, said Jason Bowling, Chief Executive Officer at SSVEC.

"The USDA's New ERA Program significantly bolsters SSVEC's commitment to fostering growth and resilience in Southern Arizona's rural communities," Bowling said. "This funding will enable us to expand access to affordable clean energy solutions while maintaining the reliability our members count on."

Speaking at a town hall event on September 12 in Marana, featuring U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Bowling emphasized the grant's potential impact on rural electric cooperatives like SSVEC.

"We appreciate the USDA's dedication to supporting cooperative utilities, ensuring long-term benefits and stability for the families we serve for generations to come," he said.

Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. (AEPCO) has been selected to receive the \$485 million in grant through the US Departments of Agriculture's New Empowering Rural America (ERA) Program.

"The Biden-Harris Administration understands that Western states like Arizona face unique challenges related to our changing climate," said Secretary Vilsack. "We are investing historic resources in innovative solutions to help Arizona communities reduce wildfire risk and adapt in the face of drought. At the same time, we are looking to the future by investing in clean energy infrastructure, creating new jobs, and building prosperity in rural communities."

Patrick Ledger, chief executive officer of AEPCO, announced that the New ERA grant opportunity will enable AEPCO to retire its last remaining coal assets by the end of 2027 and invest in substantial renewable energy projects, including 730 megawatts of solar and

2,910 megawatt hours of battery energy storage. These efforts will benefit 40 member cooperatives and public power utilities across the rural Southwest.

"AEPCO and its members play a crucial role in providing reliable, affordable, and responsible power and energy services to rural areas of the Southwest," Ledger said. "With the USDA's support, the New ERA Program creates a once-in-a-generation opportunity for AEPCO and its cooperative and public power members to invest in renewable energy projects without sacrificing reliability or affordability."

As part of the grant program, AEPCO has developed a Community Benefits Plan (CBP) that includes engaging with union partners, local community colleges, and other stakeholders to create new renewable energy apprenticeship programs. AEPCO will also work with ranchers and farmers in its service areas to develop training programs that will benefit rural communities and economies.

Jordy Fuentes, executive director of the Arizona Power Authority, also attended the event and highlighted that the benefits of AEPCO's New ERA projects will extend beyond Arizona's electric cooperative communities, positively impacting the broader rural Southwest, a region significantly affected by long-term drought.