

[By Howard Weiss-Tisman](#)

Two Windham County companies will share in almost \$100,000 in renewable energy grants given out this week through the USDA Rural Energy for America Program. Vermont's Congressional Delegation announced the grants this week, which will go toward 10 different projects across the state.

Whitney Elms LLC of Vernon, and Vermont Homestead LLC of Putney each received \$16,600 to help pay for photovoltaic solar generating systems at their company's offices.

The grants were announced Wednesday by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack as part of the \$11.6 million given out to farms and rural business owners to install renewable energy systems and to make energy efficiency improvements.

"REAP loans and grants help Vermont farms and small businesses boost their bottom lines and improve production," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the most senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "On farms and in rural businesses, embedding energy conservation into the cost stream promotes economic growth through steady savings, while reducing our dependence on fossil fuels."

John Rawley owns Vermont Homestead LLC, a company that helps homeowners install their own energy efficient systems, but he has not been able to afford his own solar system for his workshop.

Rawley said that with the REAP grant, the new equipment will pay for itself in energy savings in seven or eight years.

like this is pretty long," Rawley said. "I would not have been able to do it without the grant."

Rawley had an 11 kilowatt system installed, which includes 48 solar panels, and will provide all of the energy needs of his company which is located at the end of Holland Hill Road in Putney.

Peter Thurrell, who owns Soveren, the company that installs the solar systems, said helping clients fill out their grant applications is becoming a part of the services he offers when taking on a job.

The more-than-300 page USDA grant has to be submitted to four different offices, but the federal money goes a long way toward helping farmers and business owners pay for their solar systems.

Thurrell, who has his company in Westminster West, has helped farmers in Westminster and Putney, and recently completed a project at West Hill Bike Shop in Dummerston.

Over the past few years, Thurrell has helped bring in more than \$200,000 in federal money to help pay for solar power projects.

"If you ever thought about doing this, now is the time to do it," he said. "The money helps pay for the work, and it helps save the planet."

"These investments in energy efficiency and sustainable energy will not only help Vermonters save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they also will help create desperately needed jobs," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

Jeffrey Dunklee, who is co-owner of Whitney Elms LLC, a real estate company in Vernon also said the federal grant helped convince him to have the solar cells installed at his company's office.

Dunklee also installed an 11 kilowatt system which will provide energy for his company throughout the year.

"The federal money makes this work," said Dunklee. "We wouldn't have done it without the grants."