



Solar energy market georgia

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This story was produced through a collaboration between Daily Yonder and Climate Central. Julia Elman (Climate Central) contributed data reporting.

When Olivia Amyette was still a teenager, her grandfather suffered a stroke from which he would never recover. Her need to stay by his side during the worst of the Covid pandemic pushed her into a path after college that led to remarkable success as a clean energy entrepreneur in rural Georgia, where the sector is booming.

When Amyette went off to college to study computer science at Georgia Tech, she'd spend the weekends back home in Lawrenceville, a suburb of Atlanta, taking care of her grandfather. When it was time to graduate, Amyette worried she wouldn't find a job in the tech industry that was close enough to home. It was the height of the pandemic and too much travel would put her vulnerable grandfather at greater risk of Covid.

That's when Amyette decided to start her own business.

"With the flexibility that comes with being an entrepreneur, I was able to get the closure that I needed," Amyette said. "We were all there when he passed away. It was very peaceful."

Jobs and business growth in carbon-free power and other green technologies is stimulating economies across rural Georgia, which is among the frontrunner states attracting these industries. That growth is leading to a scramble to find quality, affordable housing and add other infrastructure to accommodate booming workforces.

The industry's growth is being fostered in large part by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a sweeping spending bill central to President Joe Biden's economic legacy that aimed to curb inflation and address climate change and healthcare costs, among other things.

"The overall success of the company would not really be likely if the IRA wasn't in place," said Amyette. "It drives the demand for solar."

Amyette is the owner of two companies, Infinite Energy Advisors, a solar energy company in Cleveland, Georgia, a small town about an hour and a half northeast of Atlanta, and the Solar Knowledge Institute (SKI), a workforce development program that prepares workers for careers in the solar industry.

"I want to make sure that people of all backgrounds have access to high paying jobs, and solar's a



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great field for that," said Amyette. "It puts a lot of money in the workers' pockets."

Solar panel manufacturer QCells employs nearly 1,800 people in Dalton, Georgia, the center of a small metropolitan area in North Georgia, where it produces 30,000 solar panels a day, said company spokesperson Marta Stoepker. The company employs another 750 workers at a plant in the nearby town of Cartersville, population 23,100.

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