

# Case Study

February 2026

*How Pontiac, IL Converted 42 Acres into a Productive Agrivoltaics Community Solar Project Through Illinois Shines*



# Summary

Pontiac, Illinois is a historic stop on Route 66 that is embracing modernity and clean energy. The town is newly home to Walldog Solar, a unique agrivoltaics and pollinator-friendly community solar project, delivering clean solar power to 775 customers. Excited about the chance to leverage state incentives and benefit this community, an experienced Illinois Shines Approved Vendor (“AV”)<sup>1</sup> worked with Pontiac city leaders and a local landowner to help develop a Traditional Community Solar (“TCS”) project through Illinois Shines. This study showcases how a small town created big impacts for its community, including adopting affordable clean energy, creating bill savings for families, prioritizing workforce equity and economic development, achieving agricultural and ecological benefits, and investing in local nonprofits.

## Facing the Challenge

An Approved Vendor (AV) of the Illinois Shines Program identified a unique opportunity for the City of Pontiac to help its residents save on electricity costs, support the local pollinator population and agriculture, and promote equitable workforce and economic growth. The AV had a vision - constructing an agrivoltaics project, meaning it would combine agriculture and solar energy generation on a single parcel of land. To maximize community benefits, all project development work<sup>2</sup> was performed by Equity Eligible Contractors, and the project itself was constructed as a pollinator-friendly habitat.

The Approved Vendor planned to submit a Traditional Community Solar project application to [Illinois Shines](#), a state-administered solar incentive program overseen by the [Illinois Power Agency](#) that provides incentives for the development of qualified projects, including community solar. Incentives can be passed on to consumers in the form of lower subscription rates. Illinois Shines scores community solar applications and awards capacity for projects meeting scoring thresholds on

<sup>1</sup> Approved Vendors are entities approved by the Program Administrator (as an agent of the Illinois Power Agency), to submit project applications to the Illinois Shines Program.

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this category, “project development work” refers to all construction and electrical work on a project, and project-specific site assessment work such as permitting, legal, and other site-specific development work, including work that may have already been undertaken prior to project application. Non-site-specific development functions (such as general sales and marketing activities) will not be considered as project development work. This definition also differs from the “project workforce” definition utilized for the Minimum Equity Standards as outlined in P.A. 102-0662 and in this Guidebook’s Glossary, for which a firm’s Illinois-based employees are included in the “project workforce” regardless of function.

# Project Details



**Project Name:**  
Walldog Solar



**Energization:**  
February, 2025



**System Size:**  
5 MW



**Subscriber Mix:**  
62% Small Subscribers



**Expected yearly energy production:**  
10,477 MWh



**First Year Subscriber Energy Savings:**  
\$107,000



**Illinois Shines Project Category:**  
Traditional Community Solar



**Project type:**  
Community Solar

criteria designed to benefit communities.<sup>3</sup> The AV’s project application for Pontiac met many of the criteria the Program considers when qualifying projects, positioning it to be a high-scoring project more likely to receive a REC (“Renewable Energy Credit”)<sup>4</sup> Contract.

## *Developing a Solution*

### **A Larger Parcel And Support for Agrivoltaics and a Pollinator Habitat**

Pontiac’s community solar project, Walldog Solar, began its journey years earlier with a prospective site and a project size of 2 megawatts, the program’s project size limit at the time. After the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (“CEJA”) introduced new project-sizing parameters for Illinois Shines, the AV sought approval for a 5 megawatt project, with a new project application, updated interconnectivity study, and expanded land agreements. The size increase improved Walldog Solar’s overall economics, including increased lease revenue for the landowner, additional tax revenue for the community, and greater labor opportunities for the project’s contractors.

The AV, landowner, and community collaboratively updated the project design to meet the program’s requirements for agrivoltaics<sup>5</sup>) and for pollinator-friendly habitat including native planting and flowering<sup>6</sup>.

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3 For more information on Community Solar scoring, reference the [Program Year 2025-26 Illinois Shines Program Guidebook, Appendix E \(p. 157\)](#)

4 RECs represent the environmental value of energy generated by renewable sources. With RECs, the amount of renewable energy sent to the utility grid is tracked and a REC is issued when one megawatt-hour of electricity from a renewable energy source is produced. Illinois Shines has set incentive amounts that are paid for RECs produced by solar projects participating in the Program. The incentives are paid to participating AVs and savings may be passed on to customers.

5 To earn agrivoltaics points, at least 50% of the Illinois Shines Traditional Community Solar projects must be dedicated to agricultural production at the time of energization and must accommodate continuous crop growth.

6 As defined in the Pollinator Friendly Solar Site Act (525 ILCS 55)



## Community Outreach

The AV proactively engaged the surrounding community to understand and address priorities and concerns. Early conversations revealed questions, feedback, and data related to drainage and flooding events at the project site, which the AV used to inform the project's design. Outreach also revealed residents' previous concerns about other area solar projects. In response, the AV hosted community open houses and office hours to address questions and invite residents' opinions.

## Equity Eligible Contractor (“EEC”) Partnership

Community solar projects have significant labor needs, and the AV sought to work with certified Illinois Shines Equity Eligible Contractors (EECs), which are businesses majority-owned by Equity Eligible Persons.<sup>7</sup> After meeting with many engineering, procurement, and construction (“EPC”) firms, the AV selected an EPC who subcontracted work with multiple EECs. As a result, the AV partnered with multiple EECs for electrical, racking, and module installation.

## Project Approval and Construction

With new approvals and an updated project application, Walldog Solar and its AV earned a REC incentive contract from Illinois Shines and finalized a lease for 107 acres in Pontiac, of which 42 acres would support the project footprint. The AV worked with landscape consultants to refine the project's agrivoltaics design and coordinated with shepherds to bring sheep for grazing. The AV also incorporated native grasses to address drainage issues, stabilize soil, and improve long-term site resilience. After earning community trust and support, site development began. The project committed over 51% of the REC contract value to EECs, with the electrical contractor earning more than \$3.25 million, and the racking and module installation contractor earning nearly \$2 million. By early 2025, Walldog Solar was energized into service.

**“We’ve maintained very close relationships with our engineering, procurement and construction partner (“EPC”), subcontractors, and shepherds, which has served us on our agrivoltaics and pollinator-friendly habitat commitments, as well as ensuring we utilize EECs for key construction and installation activities.”**

**- Director of Community Solar, Walldog Solar Approved Vendor**

<sup>7</sup> The IPA Act defines “Equity Eligible Person” (EEP) as a person who would most benefit from equitable investments by the State designed to combat discrimination, specifically: 1) Graduates or current or former participants in the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program, Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program, or the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program, and the Solar Training Pipeline and Multicultural Jobs Program; 2) Persons who are graduates of or currently enrolled in foster care system; 3) Persons who were formerly incarcerated; 4) Persons whose primary residence is in an Equity Investment Eligible Community.

# Results

Walldog Solar was designed to benefit local residents. In addition to offering clean energy, agricultural production, and ecological benefits, the project became a significant economic driver for the state and local community. 98% of the construction labor for the project was completed by Illinois residents—with the majority performed by local EECs—and the project is delivering important property tax revenue.

The project also brought meaningful benefits to local subscribers, with Illinois Shines incentives helping families reduce their energy expenses. It also spurred new partnerships with local organizations.

Additionally, the AV established a scholarship program for Livingston County Schools and has sponsored multiple community events with local nonprofits, as it builds reciprocal relationships in Pontiac.

Walldog Solar's panels sit above a carefully selected mix of harvest and grazing crops, native short-stature grasses, and pollinator-friendly plants, all of which were selected in the site design to foster restoration of existing fields and wetlands, while providing an environment for efficient solar operation, ensuring that at the end of this project's lifecycle the land can return to 100% agricultural production. Its sheep graze the site, having risen from 80 to 160 sheep onsite between mid-May and mid-June to control annual weeds, manage vegetation, and support stability over time.

## Key Lessons Learned

**1. Keeping the “Community” in Community Solar.** From the landowner who committed the acreage, to the EECs who helped build the project, to the local subscribers, Walldog Solar prioritized Pontiac-area residents at every step. The AV worked directly with key local stakeholders to host community open houses and office hours, inviting and addressing residents' questions and concerns. These forums allowed the AV to share expected savings, job creation, and economic investment, while inviting residents to help shape the project, which increased trust and enthusiasm, and revealed additional opportunities for community partnership.

**2. Embracing Change Can Make Projects Stronger.** Walldog Solar's journey shows how embracing legislative updates and evolving program requirements can lead to a more impactful project. The Enactment of CEJA in 2021 brought changes to the Program that increased the opportunities available to the AV. Rather than shying away from these changes, the AV leveraged the new legislation to expand and strengthen Walldog Solar. As the project changed and grew significantly from its original design, the community and AV worked together to increase local benefits. The Illinois Shines team provided guidance, clarified requirements, and supported the AV as it navigated a second application cycle, interconnection studies, pollinator-friendly standards, and agrivoltaics specifications. By leaning on resources available to it, the AV supported adjustments to the project that strengthened the agricultural and pollinator plans, improved long-term site resilience, and aligned community and workforce benefits with Illinois' clean-energy vision.

**3. Leverage Illinois' Emphasis on Agrivoltaics and Pollinator Stewardship.** As an agrivoltaics project, Walldog Solar proved that TCS benefits extend beyond clean energy generation and economic development. Agrivoltaics and pollinator-friendly projects can improve soil health, reintroduce native vegetation, support pollinator species, reduce insecticide use by introducing grazing animals to the site, and address existing on-site issues, like drainage.<sup>8</sup> These practices, which earn points in Illinois Shines, help improve the agricultural productivity of land, benefiting owners, farmers, and communities. Through additional project refinements to mowing schedules, grazing intensity, and seasonal planting, Walldog Solar demonstrates that with thoughtful planning, evaluation, and adjustments, agrivoltaics can strengthen the land, while generating clean, reliable energy for Illinois families.

<sup>8</sup> [nrel.gov/solar/market-research-analysis/agrivoltaics](https://www.nrel.gov/solar/market-research-analysis/agrivoltaics)



***We believe that community engagement and community involvement and relationships are a requirement on every project. For Walldog, we established a scholarship program for Livingston County Schools, and have sponsored other community events and nonprofits. It's important to us that this project supports a reciprocal relationship, and that we're bringing benefits to the community as a partner and a neighbor. ”***

***- Director of Community Solar, Walldog Solar Approved Vendor***



**Ready to bring your Traditional  
Community Solar project to life?**

Learn more about what it takes at the [Illinois Shines TCS page](#).