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Centinela Solar Energy officially breaks ground on facility

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Story by Jose Martinez, Reporter

CALEXICO - It will be the biggest renewable energy facility in The Imperial valley. As of this week, Centinela Solar Energy has been cleared to begin construction on the plant.

The 700 million dollar project promises to give The Imperial Valley a huge economic boost and bring in hundreds of jobs, something that this area, that has a 29 percent unemployment rate, could really use.

With The Imperial Valley sitting at the top of the unemployment list in the nation, Centinela Solar Energy and Fluor Construction plan to make it a priority to hire as many local residents as possible.

"We made it a focus to work with local contractors", says Vice President of LS Power, Eric Crawford. "We also have local opportunities so we're working with the unions to do training. We think it's a great opportunity. There's this project, and there are other solar projects on the horizon, so as people get trained, they can go from this project to another project. So a great opportunity".

The Renewable Energy Facility will be built on more than 1,600 acres of private land and will sit less than 6 miles from The Imperial Valley substation.

For Imperial County Supervisor Mike Kelly, he's especially excited by the promise the facility will bring an estimated 450 million dollars to the local economy. These additional dollars will create a trickle down effect, in creating even more jobs that are not tied to the solar plant.

"I think today is an outstanding day for Imperial County to fully utilize one of the resources that we do have here, which is the sun", says Chairman of The Imperial County Board of Supervisors, Mike Kelly. "It's a dynamic opportunity for us economically it benefits that local businesses and more importantly, it creates jobs".

Michael Niggli from San Diego Gas & Electric says that the facility will help the state reach its goal of providing clean and renewable energy to its residents.

"This is vital; this is actually one of the steps that gets us towards meeting our goals for the state of California", he says. "We have a goal to have 33 percent of our energy provided from renewable resources and this is one of the key steps".

It took Centinela Solar energy 4 years to get all the permits approved by county, state, and federal authorities

The construction of the solar plant is set to take approximately 22 months and will be fully operational in early 2014.