Large-scale solar installation keeps Bella Frutta going

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When Bella Frutta, a specialised packing facility for apples and pears in Ceres, reached out to African Technical Innovations (ATI) for a solar solution, they had one specific goal in mind: To secure a system that was of the highest quality, with exceptional performance. ATI, recognising the opportunity, rose to the challenge and turned to SolarWorld Africa to provide high calibre inverters and panels. The resulting installation was a resounding success, leading to a subsequent project with African Solar Installations (ASI) that also utilised the same premium products.

Bella Frutta, equipped with a workforce of 620 individuals during peak season and 250 individuals during off season, engages in local operations encompassing short-term bin storage, packing, finished product storage, and loadouts. The company relied on two sizable diesel generators to ensure an uninterrupted electricity supply for their conveyor belts and storage units.

However, escalating power outages and rising diesel costs necessitated an ideal photovoltaic (PV) solution that could seamlessly integrate with the existing diesel generators. To attain operational stability and adhere to the rigorous demands of the European export market, Bella Frutta sought PV modules and inverters renowned for their exceptional quality, performance, and capacity to provide yield security.

Kobus Engelbrecht, managing director of ATI, was responsible for the first solar installation at the premises. “We contacted SolarWorld Africa immediately for two main reasons. The first because they are our trusted partners and will not accept anything but the best in terms of product performance and client service. And secondly because they represent world-leading brands locally, and through them, ATI installed excellent Huawei SUN2000-100KTL smart string inverters, combined with the best-in-class PV modules from Hanwha Q Cells, allowing us to offer Bella Frutta the most efficient solution.

“For the first phase of the project in December 2020, we used two SUN2000-100KTL Huawei inverters and 430W Q Cells PV modules for the 200 kWp installation. The initial installation, including the integration of the existing diesel generators, was a success and they decided to extend and increase their solar power generation.”

Thanks to the performance of the products installed in phase one, the Bella Frutta executive team could see the benefits of going solar when working with the right team very quickly. So, when the time came to discuss the feasibility of a second solar installation project, they reached out the same trusted partners specifically requesting the same trusted products.

In the second phase, the installation consisted of eight SUN2000-100KTL Huawei inverters and more than 1 MW of Q Cells PV modules, again supplied by SolarWorld.

Jandre Engelbrecht, managing director of ASI, headed up the second phase installation: “As in phase one, the Bella Frutta client was happy with the existing system as the solution was tailored to their load profile offering energy savings and quality products that had performed exceptionally well to date, so we were confident recommending Huawei and Q Cells again.”

He continues: “Huawei have also embraced digital technology which aims to eliminate unnecessary costs for its partners as there are no unnecessary technical call-out fees. Their app, FusionSolar, is practical, user-friend and frequently updated – it is a plus point as I use it to monitor the Bella Frutta installations while on the go.”

Huawei’s management system allows users the flexibility to check the status of the installation and identify problems remotely, thus reducing manual re-sets and on-site working hours.

Gregor Küpper, managing director of SolarWorld Africa, explains: “Our business prides itself in offering high-quality products with excellent performance and building trusted and long-term relationships. When our long-term partners, ATI and ASI, recommended Huawei and Q Cells, we knew that both projects would yield favourable results for Bella Frutta in terms of quality and cost savings.”

Jean du Plessis, financial manager at Bella Frutta, says they can generate 20–30% of power needed to run the packhouse. “With our energy crisis, we had to consider other alternatives to address the risk involved at our packhouse. One option was solar and the other was generators as the sun only shines in the daytime and we need electricity 24/7. Generating our own electricity right there on-site means that we’re relying less on the national grid and traditional utility supplier to power our business. In a nutshell, the more energy we produce, the more money we save.”

Another attractive aspect of solar panels is the low maintenance costs involved in keeping them. Du Plessis adds: “We manage just fine by cleaning them a couple of times a year at most. Again, since they have no moving parts, there is no wear and tear involved. For those considering solar, once you’ve covered the initial cost, you can expect very little spending on maintenance and ongoing repair work, leaving you to enjoy the savings.”

Green initiatives are also high on Bella Frutta’s agenda, and the ability of solar panels to produce energy without greenhouse gases or water pollution made it even more attractive to the team based in Ceres, and soon, hopefully more business will turn to solar to fulfil their large-scale power needs.

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