

Consolidating N.J.'s clean-tech resources into database for businesses

Online center a one-stop center for incentives, assistance programs

By J. Kaltwasser, www.NJBIZ.com 4/16/12

The Garden State is known as a hub for the solar industry, but as new technologies and new approaches to the nation's energy puzzle come on line, state officials are turning their focus toward a more expansive goal — making the state a haven for clean-tech startups.

One part of the effort is the launch of a new website, the New Jersey Clean Energy Resource Network. Housed on Rutgers University's site and developed by the Rutgers EcoComplex and the Meadowlands Commission Business Accelerator, the site is designed to be an easy-to-use database bringing together information about incentives and business assistance programs at the state and federal level, from both the public and private sectors.

Margaret Brennan-Tonetta, associate vice president for economic development at Rutgers, said the site is critical because it promotes the state's clean energy programs — and the notion that New Jersey is eager to help new businesses.

"As incubator managers, we're constantly dealing with business owners who are coming to us for information and with questions, and then we wind up going to all of these different agency websites to try to find the answers to them," she said, adding that she believes the site is the most comprehensive of its kind in the nation.

In making the database, officials compiled more than 300 links to incentives, financing opportunities, incubators and other assistance, as well as information on regulations. The site features a summary of each program, as well as a personal contact, when possible.

The site has been in development for more than a year, and was designed by **J.D. Giron LLC**, a Web design firm within the Meadowlands accelerator.

BPU President **Robert M. Hanna** said the state's robust Clean Energy Program can be an economic driver in the state by fostering clean-tech industries, and by helping businesses lower their energy bills through energy efficiency measures, "but we struggle at times to get the availability of those programs out to target audiences," he added. "We really need to market our programs so folks can take advantage of it."

The site is partially funded by the Board of Public Utilities as part of the budget for its Clean Energy Program. The BPU will provide ongoing funding so the site can be maintained and updated regularly.

The website is just one piece of a larger plan. Rutgers has developed a Clean Energy Business

Strategic Plan, which aims to develop more resources for clean energy business development. It also has created a group to consider ways to speed the development of a clean energy industry in the state, which is expected to meet for the first time in June.

Michel Bitritto, director of the Meadowlands accelerator, said New Jersey has advantages over New York when it comes to clean tech, including a lower cost of living. She said the Big Apple has become something of a hub for entrepreneurs, but New Jersey has a head start when it comes to green energy technologies, like solar or geothermal power.

"I think people are beginning to realize that if they want to live in the city, they can live in the city," she said, "but their business can grow here."

Paula Durand, senior venture officer in the technology and life sciences division of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, said New Jersey enjoys a good reputation in clean tech.

"We're really very well known nationally, especially for solar, so we're always fielding inquiries from companies nationally and (from) overseas," she said.

She said other states often ask her advice about how to grow their own clean-tech sectors — a fact that underscores the level of competition for clean-tech jobs.

In its October solar jobs census, the Solar Foundation counted more than 2,800 solar jobs in New Jersey — the ninth-highest total in the nation. The state also has been active promoting energy efficiency work, and New Jersey could potentially gain hundreds of wind energy jobs.

"We're doing everything we can to promote green jobs here in the state," Hanna said. "Whatever the green technologies are, we would love to see them come here to New Jersey, and with the availability of EDA financing and a number of other programs we have, perhaps that will happen."