



Maria Katherman stands next to a solar freezer in front of her newly installed solar panels on her property in Douglas, Wyoming.

Maria Katherman - Douglas, Wyoming (December, 2017)

We have been thinking about solar for 20 years. It's just one of those things that we never got around to. We installed this spring. I think we started in March and then had to wait for the ground to thaw to do some trenching that needed done. It's been fabulous, really fabulous. There's not been one hitch.

We have nine full-sized panels on a ground mount system. Our son looked at our energy use and the output of the solar panels and figured out what we needed. We are hooked to the grid here, so rather than go with batteries we go with net metering, so we use the grid as a battery, essentially. The thing that we would like to do (I get it, it's pie in the sky and it's never going to happen) but my husband works in Casper and has a condo there that he uses in bad weather. We would like to have just one account, where our solar credits from home could be used there.

It looks like we will make a little bit more than we need this year. In the summer we use solar for water pumping, we have a shop and it has an electric heater, and then everything for the house. We don't heat the house with electricity, but lights, computers, electrical gizmos. We have one truck that we put an electrical heater in at night. As the fall comes on, I heat water tanks for stock.

There's a rural incentive, the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant that we were able to use. And there was the federal tax incentive. Those two were very important for us. For me, when you look at the big picture, the Laramie station in Wheatland is one of the oldest and dirtiest power plants in the nation, it's a mess. The cost of replacing that and getting it up to speed, I keep thinking, "Geez, you could almost make the difference if enough people in the area went to solar." If that was incentivized the same as coal, as the power company, it would be doable. I think Wyoming could do a lot, but the tax base for the state is coal and oil and gas, so if that's paying the bills, that's calling the shots.

You have to think, what's the thing that makes you say, "Okay, I'm really doing this" and for us it was visiting a friend up in Sheridan. She had older solar panels and she was putting in some new ones to power a shop. And seeing how easy it was and how well it worked, that was enough for us. Having her have good references for Range Solar and Wind was good too.

It's crazy to say it, but there haven't been any negatives to doing this, not one. For the first three months, Stacey and Mark, the installers, would call us a lot and check in. If there had been any problems, they would have been on top of it, but there haven't been. It's just been problem free. When Range put the panels in they were really good about walking around the place, positioning the panels, the angles and finding the best location. I think a lot of our trouble-free time has been because they were so thoughtful from the inception of the project.

I love driving down the driveway and seeing the panels. We live probably ten crow miles from the Dave Johnson Power plant. We're downwind from them and the sun sets into their haze everyday. You can see this line of brown residue from their smokestacks settling in the Platte River Valley. They get that coal from the Powder River Basin, and it's probably not the best coal. We have a tremendously high asthma rate for the kids here. It's really important to me to try something different that has a big local effect.

My main advice for people is not to wait. There's no reason to. If you're talking about it and thinking about it, call up installers. I cannot recommend Range Solar and Wind any higher. They're dependable; they're all over the state. Once people have solar panels installed they want to make converts because they're just so wonderful to have!