

Case study

# Solar delivers energy certainty for Watsonville Produce

**centrica**  
Business Solutions



## Fresh food processing business Watsonville Produce Inc. fires up solar ambitions after Centrica Business Solutions cuts through project complexity.

Watsonville Produce Inc. is a fresh food processing business in California that employs more than 100 people. They pride themselves on delivering the highest quality produce and the best value to customers in a price-sensitive market. To strengthen their competitive position in the industry, they needed to reduce the high energy costs at their 44,000 sq. ft. cold storage facility.

Watsonville Produce knew tackling this challenge would need a tailored solution that would take into account the business's yearly months of operation in the California facility between the end of March and the middle of November. To help them achieve this, Watsonville Produce searched for a trusted partner that would help make the right investment.



**3,100**

solar panels

**~70%**

projected annual  
energy offset

**150**

equivalent homes  
powered 8 hrs/day

## Right-sizing their solar plans

Not all parts of California are blessed with year-round sunshine. Particularly in coastal areas, like in Watsonville Produce's corner of the state, days can be foggy. However, solar solutions are an increasingly viable power option for power-hungry businesses. The challenge for Watsonville Produce was to right-size their solar capacity. They needed to generate enough power on the sunny days to power their warehouse facility, but not so much as to incur investment costs from the local power supplier in upgrading the network infrastructure for an oversized solution. The right balance between cost-effectiveness and the appropriate technical approach is not simple to achieve, so Watsonville Produce took the guesswork out of the equation by selecting Centrica Business Solutions out of five vendors that were initially considered for the project.

“Solar should have been an easy choice, but it can be incredibly complicated. Centrica Business Solutions' expertise got us over the hurdles. They saved us a lot of time and a lot of money.”

Matt Cuzick, Plant Manager, Watsonville Produce Inc.

## Technical overview

Centrica Business Solutions planned and delivered a one megawatt, 2,000 Amp, ground-mounted solar power solution featuring 3,100 solar panels on land adjacent to the Watsonville Produce warehouse that went live at the beginning of January 2021. Since then, it has performed at or above expected values. The system is set up as a net-metering solution. The electricity produced outside of Watsonville Produce's seasonal operations, which would otherwise remain unused, is fed back into the local grid.

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Matt Cuzick, Plant Manager, Watsonville Produce Inc.

## Customer results

Watsonville Produce's solar project is on track to generate 70% of the facility's annual energy usage. With the site running large refrigeration units for eight months of the year, this provides cost certainty at a time when non-renewable energy costs are rising. Matt Cuzick, Plant Manager at Watsonville Produce, says the project is in line to produce a return on investment within just five years.

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By keeping the generator under one megawatt, it means the local energy supplier doesn't need to upgrade the utility infrastructure, enabling Watsonville Produce to avoid a \$800,000 surcharge that would have rendered the shift to alternative sources of energy cost-ineffective.

"Solar should have been an easy choice, but it can be incredibly complicated. Centrica Business Solutions' expertise got us over the hurdles. They saved us a lot of time and a lot of money," concludes Matt.

The project also brings Watsonville Produce in line with sustainability best practices. California has some of the United States' most ambitious environmental targets, and, as a business in the agriculture sector, Watsonville Produce is keen to keep pace with industry expectations.



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