

ENERGYWIRE

An E&E Publishing Service

ELECTRICITY: NRG links with supplier of household products in renewables partnership (Thursday, May 8, 2014)

Edward Klump, E&E reporter

NRG Energy Inc. suddenly has a stable of famous brands associated with its push for renewable energy.

The power company yesterday announced a partnership with Unilever United States Inc., part of a consumer products conglomerate that supplies everything from Ben & Jerry's ice cream to Lipton tea to Vaseline.

NRG plans to help Unilever with on-site and off-site renewable generation intended to produce 100 percent clean energy for its U.S. sites by 2020, the companies said in a news release. The agreement follows Unilever's U.S. use of Renewable Energy Certificates, which are credits for using energy from third-party renewable sources.

"Unilever, through its commitment to clean energy, is demonstrating in a truly meaningful way that it cares about its consumers and their well-being in a manner far beyond that of conventional companies seeking to sell products," David Crane, NRG's CEO, said in a statement.

Crane praised Unilever for "demonstrating through actions, rather than just words, what being a leader in the clean energy economy means."

The Unilever deal is the latest move in NRG's public promotion of on-site power and renewable energy as key parts of the future U.S. electric business. NRG's holdings include power plants that run on fossil fuels, as well as solar and wind installations, retail electric operations and a residential solar business. NRG has financial headquarters in Princeton, N.J., and operational headquarters in Houston.

Crane has said his company is using avenues such as associations with NFL teams to spread the word about its energy vision, which includes more solar installations (*EnergyWire*, May 1). His remarks frequently touch on the role of personal choices while discussing the limitations of the current electric grid.

Yesterday's announcement also dovetails with the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, which the release called "the company's global blueprint for sustainable growth that aims to double the size of Unilever's business while reducing the company's environmental footprint and increasing its positive social impact."

The Unilever Group includes companies registered in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Unilever said it has sales in more than 190 countries and about 10,000 workers in the United States. Its portfolio of brands includes Axe, Dove, I Can't Believe It's Not Butter!, Klondike, Noxzema, Popsicle, Q-tips and Suave.

Last month, Unilever [said](#) it had made progress on its sustainable living plan in the three years since it had been launched. The company said it planned to take on several issues, including combating climate change by seeking to end deforestation, improving food security by promoting sustainable agriculture, and helping more people gain access to safe drinking water.

Kees Kruyhoff, president of Unilever North America, said in a statement yesterday that his company hopes the "collaboration with NRG will also inspire a broader acceleration and uptake of renewable energy technologies." The partnership with NRG and a move to 100 percent renewables in the United States "will make our business more resilient, sustainable, and profitable," he said.

The partnership was designed to have NRG "employ various alternative energy technologies that will be scalable and transferable to other industry sectors," according to the news release. The companies said they will provide updates on the partnership's progress.

"It appears to me that it's part of Unilever's action to present itself as a sustainable company to consumers," said Charles Griffey, an adjunct professor of management at Rice University.

But Griffey said a facility that depends on solar power still may take electricity from the grid, assuming it remains connected, on days when the sun doesn't shine. The location might put net power onto the grid when measured over a month or a year, he said.

NRG, Griffey said, has shown interest in solar power in recent years, and its CEO has been vocal about the role of smaller-scale, distributed renewable power as the wave of the future.

The NRG-Unilever partnership "appears consistent with both companies' strategies," he said.

The Solar Energy Industries Association supported the announcement, citing a recent U.S. climate report.

"We have heard loud and clear the warning of climate change, and we applaud NRG and Unilever for tackling this challenge together," Ken Johnson, vice president of communications at the association, said in an emailed statement.

Johnson said more businesses in the country "are realizing the value of going solar -- both to their bottom lines and as responsible stewards of our environment, and we encourage partnerships of this kind that really move the ball forward in terms of clean energy development."

Want to read more stories like this?

[**Click here**](#) to start a free trial to E&E -- the best way to track policy and markets.

About EnergyWire

EnergyWire is written and produced by the staff of E&E Publishing, LLC. EnergyWire provides comprehensive coverage of the political, legal and business issues surrounding the rapidly evolving unconventional energy landscape. EnergyWire publishes daily at 9 a.m.