

Green Apple: The Tech Giant Moves Toward Renewable Power



Steve Jobs' legacy at Apple doesn't include much of an environmental commitment: In [environmental rankings](#) [1], technology companies like IBM, Dell, and Hewlett-Packard have outperformed Apple for years. But under Jobs' successor Tim Cook, the company appears poised to become one of the greenest large companies in the world.

Last week, Apple [won approval](#) [2] from North Carolina to build a solar farm on the site of one of its newest data center, then announced that it would include an additional solar farm on the site. The company also plans to install a hydrogen-powered fuel cell, a type of clean energy technology that only utility companies use at the scale Apple is envisioning. These on-site clean energy projects will cover three-fifths of the center's power needs, [the company predicts](#) [3]. The rest of its power will come from renewable energy projects elsewhere.

As companies like Apple build data centers all over the world, it's vital that they consider how they'll provide power to these electricity-sucking monsters. "If the cloud were a country, it would have the fifth-largest electricity demand in the world," Greenpeace wrote [in a report last month](#) [4]. And that demand is still growing: from 2005 to 2010, energy used by data centers across the world increased by more than 50 percent.

Although Apple and companies like it have bragged about the energy-efficiency of their data centers for years, Greenpeace argues that even energy-efficient centers can use huge amounts of dirty energy. In its report, the group dinged Apple in particular for relying on power that comes from coal and nuclear plants.

Apple's new solar farms help address the concerns of groups like Greenpeace. But this isn't a story only about good intentions. Duke Energy, the utility that provides

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power to North Carolina, and the state's economic development team [worked for years](#) [5] to lure Apple to the area with promises of cheap energy—cheaper than the cheap, coal-fired rates that most consumers pay. Duke has its own incentive to add renewable power to the grid: Under state law, the company must source one-eighth of its power from renewable sources by 2021. Apple won't necessarily consume all the power it produces: It will sell power from its solar projects back to the utility, [The News & Observer has reported](#) [6]. The company also stands to receive [a bonus payment](#) [6] for adding renewable power to the grid Duke oversees.

No matter why companies like Apple are adding green power to the grid, the end result is better than the status quo, where coal powers our ability to access documents, photos, and music wherever we happen to be. As more data centers are built, technology companies must be as willing to imagine a new future for energy as they are for information.

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