

Real Talk with PG&E: Melissa Schmitt

Season 2, Episode 4: Agriculture business customers

- Hey, everybody, welcome back to "Real Talk with PG&E." I'm your host, Tatiana Manning, and I support our Voice of a Customer team here at PG&E. Today, we're focusing on our agricultural business customers; we'll talk about how on-bill financing may be an option for you; learn about ways to better manage bill, especially during the growing and harvesting season; and hear about other programs and resources. In the studio today, we have Melissa Schmitt from our Small Business Engagement team. Thank you for joining us today, Melissa.

- Thank you for having me, Tatiana. I'm excited to be here. It's actually a perfect time because we are currently running our ag optimal rate where we reach out to customers and ensure that they are on the proper rate for their business. And last year, we actually saved customers over \$4 million just by updating their rate.

- That's impressive, Melissa. I'm actually really excited to have you here in studio today to hear more about how our agricultural customers can save more money. How do they differ from our standard business customer?

- So while all business customers are attentive to their energy consumption, I would say that our ag customers really focus heavily on their operations and their overall energy consumption. There's a big push for automation within the ag industry, and there's so much more equipment that goes into the overall makeup of an ag customer or an ag business that isn't often thought of first of mind. And there are a number of programs that PG&E has to offer.

- So what's, like, one of the programs that you would actually utilize to help assist our ag customers?

- One program that we have that can help support ag customers is on-bill financing. We support the customer through a third-party implementer, and the third-party implementer will help walk the customer through the entire process, from energy audit to applying for on-bill financing and all through the project development.

- In case our listeners haven't actually heard about this program before, we've touched on it in a few episodes prior to this one. It is a zero interest loan and there are a few qualifications that customers must actually have in order to qualify. So, Melissa, I just learned there's actually been an expansion to the on-bill financing program. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

- Yeah, absolutely. On-bill financing is expanding to support EV chargers and also backup battery storage. So our customers who are looking to electrify their fleet are able to utilize on-bill financing for putting in those EV chargers.

- So, Melissa, when I think about agricultural and I think about farming, I think about what I see when I'm driving through the Valley. I see the farms and the equipment, and that's where my mind goes. But what does ag all encompass?

- Agriculture is such a diverse customer base and it encompasses so many different types of companies. So breweries, wineries, dairy production, horticulture, and crop production is just a piece of this.
- Education. You're educating me all around. We've had a lot of discussion about on-bill financing and that program and how it can benefit our business customers as well as our agricultural customers, but what other considerations should our agricultural customers have when it comes to bill management?
- Yeah, so as mentioned earlier, that our ag customers focus heavily on their operations and energy consumption. So one thing for ag customers to truly keep in mind is their time-of-use plan. So ag time-of use differs from commercial. So ag time-of-use is between the hours of 5:00 PM and 8:00 PM, and that was actually negotiated by Farm Bureau with PG&E to ensure that our ag customers have enough time to utilize energy when they need to.
- Well, Melissa, I feel like you're really blowing my mind. So there's EV and ag, time-of-use hours differ from commercial, we actually worked with the Farm Bureau to actually come up with these hours to make sure that our customers do have enough time, to make sure they get what they need done. Is there anything else that you feel would be beneficial for our ag customers to know?
- Yeah, and the point that I made when we first started, in 2024, we had saved our ag customers over \$4 million.
- Yes, that's a big one that we can't forget.
- Yes. That is from a simple rate plan change. And that's something that we always encourage our ag customers every time we have a conversation with them, ensure you are setting time on your calendar annually to run a rate analysis. And if it's something that you need help with, reach out to your rep that is in your region to walk you through the process of how to do that, because that's your low-hanging fruit. That's where all of your savings is gonna come from if there is opportunity on the table. And another thing to note too is demand response. There's a really big drive for demand response within California right now. And our customers understanding their operations enough to be able to curtail usage when needed, when PG&E needs you, when the grid is strained and PG&E will call upon you to reduce, and there's incentive with demand response.
- That's awesome. Now, I know we've talked a lot about on-bill financing and the benefits of that and how our agricultural customers can actually participate and benefit from that, but what are we not thinking about when it comes to agricultural customers?
- Okay, so our customers are able to utilize on-bill financing, but ag customers are more heavily reliant on rebates. And they utilize rebates for projects like updating to LED lighting in indoor growing facilities, or VFDs on ag pumps, which is a variable frequency drive. They also offer VFDs for fans at dairy facilities. So there's a huge book of rebates available to customers for updating equipment to more energy-efficiency equipment.
- Thanks so much for joining us today, Melissa. It's a pleasure having you.
- Thank you for having me.

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