Challenge
Fruit grower, processor and shipper Rivermaid Trading Co. produces more than 50% of the pears in California and 8% of the state's cherry crop. Processing such large quantities of fruit to arrive at market in peak condition requires substantial energy for fruit processing machines and cold storage. Rivermaid was looking for a way to offset electricity costs with a clean energy solution that was as sustainable as the farming operation itself.

SunPower’s Solution
Working with Sunworks, a leading northern California solar contractor, Rivermaid turned the roof of its fruit-processing and cold storage facilities into a solar energy plant—installing 4,510 SunPower® panels—with a capacity of 1.47 MW of clean energy.

Customer Benefit
The system currently offsets up to 60% of the plant’s electricity use during the summer months and is projected to save the company more than $13 million over the next 25 years. Most importantly, solar augments the company’s sustainable farming strategy by bringing product to market with less reliance on fossil fuels.
Pruning Energy Costs to Grow a Business

Innovation has always been a mainstay of the Rivermaid Trading Co. Since the company’s earliest days in the 1930s, the northern California grower has continuously improved its operations and its position in the agriculture market. Today, the company has established itself as the top pear producer in the state, and provides 8 percent of all California cherries.

When cherries were added to the company’s repertoire a few years back, Chief Executive Officer Patrick Archibeque realized that he would need to find a way to offset the additional energy costs of growing, processing and shipping hundreds of thousands of pounds of fruit within narrow seasonal windows. Automation would be key to the company’s sustained growth, as would cold storage.

In addition to Rivermaid’s 2,500+ acres of sustainable farms, the company operates 80,000 square feet of packing facilities and 150,000 square feet of racked cold storage.

“Energy consumption at the packing facility is driven largely by cold storage,” said Archibeque. “We are able to offset almost 60 percent of our energy use in the summer by installing solar.”

Solar as Part of an Overall Sustainable Farming Strategy

Rivermaid takes its role as land stewards seriously—some of the pear trees date back to the post Gold Rush period of the 1860s. Rivermaid growers keep their use of pesticides as low as possible through integrated pest management, and practice other sustainable farming techniques, like growing orchards in rows and chipping tree prunings rather than burning. The company uses recycled plastic in packaging and recycles water from fruit processing to reduces its reliance on well water.

“Our customers are national and international retailers who are looking for
suppliers who practice not only sustainable farming practices but sustainable business practices,” said Archibeque. “Going solar builds on our sustainable practices in the orchard.”

Going solar was also a sound business investment. With the entire roof covered in highly efficient SunPower solar panels, Rivermaid can offset enough electricity to save more than $300,000 per year on energy costs.

“We did a lot of due diligence on solar panel manufacturers,” Patrick explains.

“Rivermaid spends approximately $850,000 annually on energy and with the SunPower system we expect an approximate 58% reduction in that bill.”

Kelly Christopher, Sunworks Sales representative for Rivermaid, said Sunworks recommended SunPower because the higher energy output per panel meant that Rivermaid could produce more solar electricity with the same footprint.

“We were able to increase the production by 20% with the same amount of solar,” Kelly said. “We also like the warranties on the modules—they're the best in the world. And the long-term degradation is half of what conventional modules have, so you get better production as the system ages.”

At the end of the day, Archibeque emphasizes that the company decided to go solar because it was an opportunity to build on the company's sustainability practices.

“We've become keenly aware of our consumers and what's important to them,” Patrick explains. “We felt solar was a wise capital investment that works economically, and also helps us tell our story.”

— Patrick Archibeque
CEO, Rivermaid Trading Co.