Toyota West Virginia Never Sheepish on Ren-EWE-able Energy

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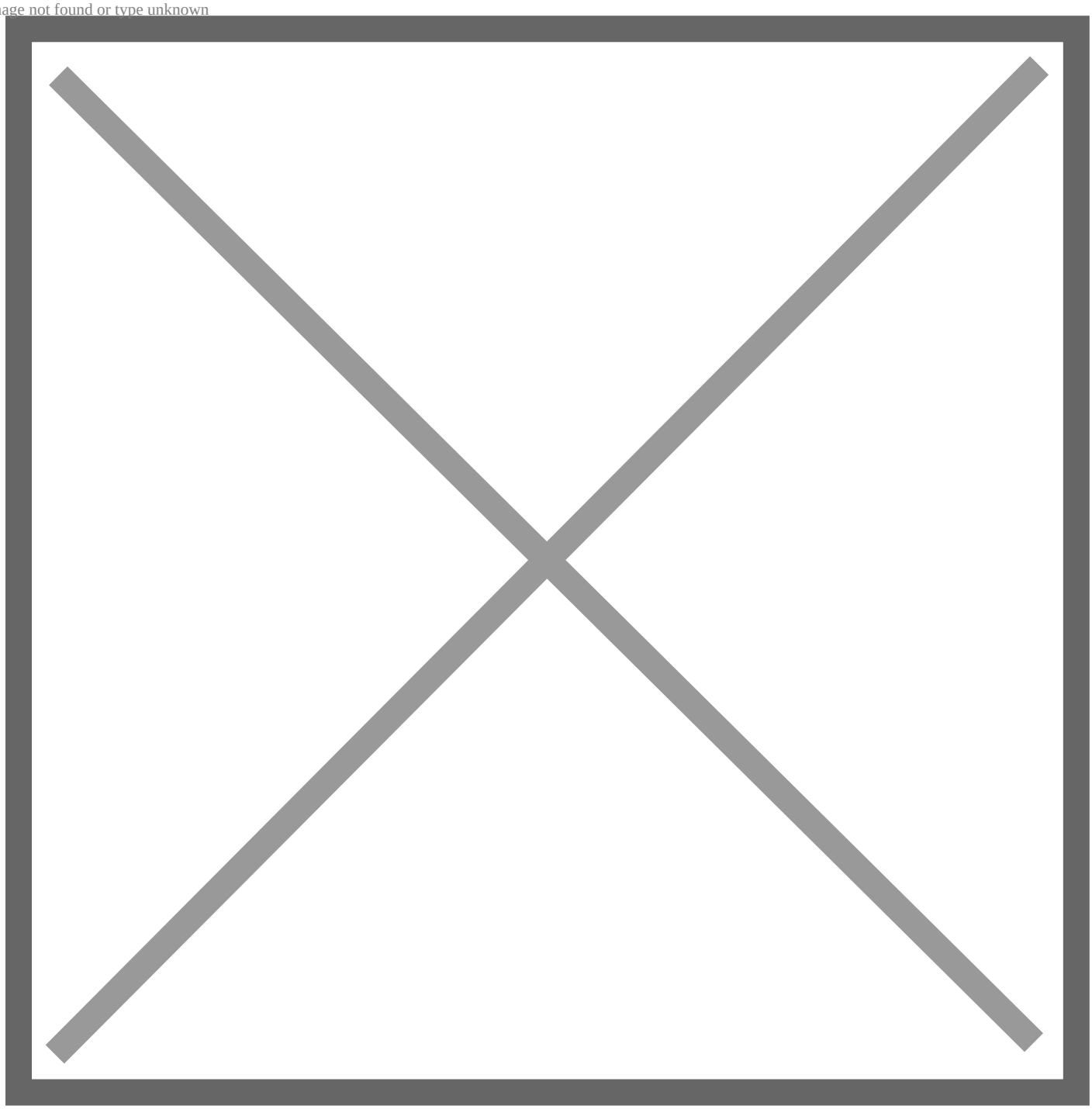

Sheer genius.

That’s the phrase being used to describe Toyota West Virginia’s newest environmental initiative.

To maintain the area around the facility’s 5-acre solar array, a herd of 20 sheep has been called in to perform some important “lambscaping.”

For solar panels to effectively create power, vegetation must be kept low. Unchecked growth can lead to unwanted shadows that block the sun’s power-generating rays.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a single sheep can eat up to four pounds of grass per day. They can easily fit underneath the solar panels and nibble up stray sprigs and weeds that grow in hard-to-reach areas.

Sheep have a carbon footprint far lower than the typical commercial mower, and they don’t spray rock and debris, which could crack or damage the equipment. Because the animal’s diet is varied, they also reduce the use of pesticides and other chemicals.

“To continue to be great stewards of our environment, we have to embrace new ideas and creative ways of thinking,” said David Rosier, Toyota West Virginia President. “This program helps us save money, lower emissions, support local farmers and do one more thing that puts us in harmony with nature.”

Toyota West Virginia is the company’s first plant to utilize agrivoltaics: using land for both agriculture and solar energy generation.

The array is behind a locked, fenced enclosure. The sheep will be monitored daily and a dog will watch over the herd. The sheep will be onsite from April through October.

Toyota West Virginia has the largest solar array in the state, which can generate 2.6 megawatts of power. That is enough to power more than 400 homes. The solar generation also reduces the plant’s C02 emissions by an estimated 4 million pounds per year. An array of five solar flowers also lines the main road leading to the facility, helping power the employee services buildings and three EV charging stations.

The plant’s biodiversity park features forest and wetland habitats, a pollinator garden, an outdoor classroom, bird houses, bat houses and a nesting platform to support avian species in the area.

Toyota West Virginia is Toyota’s only combined engine and transmission plant in North America. Additionally, Toyota West Virginia is the only manufacturing plant in North America to produce hybrid transaxles. The $2 billion facility employs more than 2,000 people under a nearly two million square foot facility. The plant has invested more than $10 million in various local philanthropic and educational initiatives over the past two decades.