

A Real No-Brainer

An Amherst, Nova Scotia family gets smart about accessing energy efficiency programs — producing more energy than they need in the process.

By Erica Butler

Just about ten minutes outside of Amherst, Nova Scotia, near the rural community of Salem, sits the home of Ravel and Taylor Perez. The house is hard to miss — it's the one covered in solar panels, soaking in the sun and generating at least 10,000 kilowatt hours of power every year. That's something the Perezes didn't have in mind when they first moved to Nova Scotia about seven years ago.

Shortly after his family settled into their oil and wood-heated home, Ravel Perez got an email from Efficiency Nova Scotia, and the rest is history. The Perez home, which cost the family about \$6,000 to heat in their first winter, would soon be producing more energy than the family uses.

But the journey didn't begin with solar panels. The first thing Efficiency NS representatives did with the Perez home was conduct a blower test, which found a drafty house in need of good old-fashioned insulation.

Luckily, the family qualified for the Nova Scotia Home-Warming Program, with the entire house getting insulated at no cost to the family. Efficiency NS then arranged for heat pumps to be installed in the newly insulated home. Funded by the province of Nova Scotia, HomeWarming offers no-charge energy assessments and free home upgrades to eligible Nova Scotians.

Shortly thereafter, the

Perezes were having their roof replaced, and the question of producing their own electricity through rooftop solar came up. Ravel says he put in another call to Efficiency NS, and eventually had a team of people at his home — equipped with drones — to evaluate its potential for producing electricity. With a steep roof pitch and no tree cover nearby, the Perez house was a natural fit, and promised to produce enough energy to make installations worthwhile. And with zero interest financing available, the Perezes went for it.

"It was a no brainer," recalls Ravel about his decision. "The second you sign the piece of paper and the solar is installed, you're already saving money on a month-to-month basis."

Ravel says people have asked exactly how much each upgrade on his energy system is saving him.

"It's hard for us to tell because we got everything done [nearly] at once... We got the new roof, the solar, the heat pumps, the insulation... So, it's like, of course it costs a lot less to heat the house now," he says. "Actually, it essentially costs nothing now, because we produce more solar than we use."

The Perezes metering agreement with Nova Scotia Power is "grandfathered in," which

means the family gets paid for every kilowatt-hour they produce over and above what they use. They pay a monthly hook up fee, and, "essentially, that's our electric bill," says Ravel. Once a year, NS Power tallies up whatever they have produced over and above what they've used and pays the Perezes for that power at the going rate. So far, Ravel says

they've been paid about \$1,000 a year for the extra electricity produced on their rooftop. "For agreements signed as of April 2022, surplus kilowatt-hours (kWh) (generated by customers who produce more electricity than they can use) will be "banked" and applied to the following bill to offset any electricity drawn from the grid until the end of the year.

The high performance of the combined energy and efficiency fixes exceeds what was originally predicted for the house, and not something they were planning for or expecting, Ravel says, adding that the family continues to make lifestyle changes when it comes to energy.

"A couple of years ago we needed a new water tank, so we looked for the one that was the most efficient," he says. "I've got an app on my phone now, and it tells me how much each thing is using... It is a bit of a mindset. It was a big learning curve for us, but now looking back, it's like, oh my God, why isn't everybody doing this?"

According to Janet Tobin, of Efficiency Nova Scotia, a lot more people are following the Perezes lead. Before 2021, Tobin says the HomeWarming Program would get up to two thousand applications each year. These days, "it's consistently been over 8,000 to 10,000," says Tobin, due to the rising cost of living and new programs and incentives coming online. That increase in popularity has caused waiting lists, says Tobin, something that Efficiency NS is actively working to reduce.

And Ravel Perez says the program, in combination with the solar panels, has been a game changer for his family.

"The amount of money and headache they've saved us," says Ravel, "it's massive."



The Perez family pose in front of their retrofitted home. (Photo by Erica Butler)

The Climate Story Network is an initiative of Climate Focus, a non-profit organization dedicated to covering stories about community-driven climate solutions.

Erica Butler is a local radio reporter and journalist based in Sackville, New Brunswick, perched on one end of the Chignecto Isthmus, the strip of land that joins Nova Scotia with the rest of the country.

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More Pet Product Businesses Join Nova Scotia Loyal

It is now easier than ever for Nova Scotia's pet owners to shop local for their pets' needs.

Canadian specialty pet retailer Pet Valu, which has 37 stores across the province, has joined the Nova Scotia Loyal program. With the program's branding, shoppers will be able to easily identify locally made products on store shelves.

"Nova Scotians want what's best for their pets and to buy local," said Colton LeBlanc, Minister of Growth and Development. "Nova Scotia Loyal is making it easier for Nova Scotians to choose made-in-Nova Scotia pet products in large retailers like Pet Valu, independent stores and in our farmers' markets."

There are more than a dozen registered Nova Scotia Loyal businesses that produce pet products, including food, treats, apparel, leashes, harnesses and collars and toys. Many of their products can be found in local Pet Valu stores across the province.

More than 1,000 local businesses have signed

up for Nova Scotia Loyal so far. 57 have signed up for the Producer Product Labelling Program. This year, about 215,500 students and new Nova Scotians across the province will receive Nova Scotia Loyal farmers' market vouchers

Nova Scotia pet product businesses currently registered with Nova Scotia Loyal: Bailey's Barkery, Dartmouth; The Dog Ate It Dog Bakery and Gifts, Black Point, Halifax County; Simply Baked Paw Bites, Porter's Lake; Green Paw Treats, Halifax; Nova Dog Bakery, East Chezzetcook; Charlie's Bakeshop, New Victoria, Cape Breton County; Sedorable, Arcadia, Yarmouth County; Sam & Paisley Treats, Aylesford, Kings County; Salty Dogs Barkery, Lockport; Hen & Goose Pet Supply Co., Wellington; Gnarly Dogs Pet Products, Shubenacadie East; Get Dirty Pet Gear, Mineville, Halifax County; Atlantick Repellent Products Inc., Blockhouse, Lunenburg County; Ocean Pride Fisheries, Wedgeport; Ocean Tails Inc., Tantallon.



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