

New green jobs next door

Green jobs are not a theoretical proposal from the people protesting public subsidies for a planned Pratt & Whitney factory in Asheville, North Carolina, but increasingly a reality in the state's robust solar sector, which [already employs](#) more than 6,000 people. In a quiet industrial zone in Fletcher, a town about 25 minutes from Asheville in neighboring Henderson County, a handful of employees from one of the state's newest solar firms are repurposing a warehouse to become a manufacturing facility for technology that produces something direly needed across polluted and arid landscapes: clean water.



Low Impact Technologies (LIT) makes what it calls “Concentrated Solar Multi-Effect Water Purification/Distillation and Dewatering Systems,” each one a long, thin trough about the size of a Ford F-150. They use solar energy to clean contaminated water, such as agricultural runoff, mining tailings, or salt water in remote communities in need of drinkable water. The company's name reflects its core value of "treading lightly or as lightly as possible on the environment," said Nick Probert, LIT's general manager.

Setting up shop in the middle of a global pandemic involved several setbacks, but Probert expects to soon rev up hiring in Fletcher in the hopes of establishing a 24-hour production line. A little over half of those hires will be blue-collar plant workers, he said, in addition to engineers and teams for marketing, sales, and administration.

The venture comes with risks. Probert said LIT was competing for \$2 million in U.S. government prize money for innovative desalination solutions with about 200 other applicants. Despite the crowded field, Probert called the current U.S. administration's approach to green energy "definitely helpful" in influencing them to set up shop in the United States as opposed to earlier plans to do so in Australia.

There's room to grow: Probert hopes to open an additional production facility and also use the current one for research and development into other potential applications, such as water aeration, a process to reoxygenate and reinvigorate stagnant ponds. He also imagines being able to drive down their costs and repurpose some of their profits for users who couldn't otherwise afford the modules.