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Winegrower Plants Vines Under Solar Shade in France

The project aims to shield grapes from frost, hail and heat while generating electricity

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In Charente-Maritime, a winegrower has planted 4 hectares of vines under photovoltaic shade structures in one of the region’s first projects designed to shield vineyards from frost, hail and heat while also generating electricity.

David Moreau, who farms in Saint-André-de-Lidon, west of Pons, has installed the system with Sun’Agri, a unit of the Sun’R group that specializes in dynamic agrivoltaics. The structures rise nearly 5 meters above the ground on a steel frame and can be adjusted remotely. Depending on the weather, they can provide shade, reduce frost

damage or limit hail exposure. At full output, the installation can produce up to 3.5 megawatts-peak of electricity a year.

Moreau said he expects the system to help protect his grapes from summer sunburn, which he says destroys between 5% and 10% of his crop each year. He also said that when the panels are set flat, they can save 70% to 80% of the vines from hail damage, and that the temperature difference under the structures gives him a 90% chance of avoiding frost losses.

The project reflects a broader push by Sun’Agri, which says it has about 40 projects operating or under construction across roughly 100 hectares, mostly in southern France. In Nouvelle-Aquitaine, seven agrivoltaic projects are being developed with a combined capacity of 46.8 MWc, according to Boris Marchal, Sun’R’s public affairs director. He said another 12 MWc site could be built in Charente-Maritime, and two more projects are under study in neighboring Charente.

The installation cost about €4 million and was built by Sun’Agri, which will pay Moreau an annual rent. Moreau only paid for the vines themselves, planted in recent weeks. He remains the owner of the land through a long-term lease arrangement that gives him control over the site, including the orientation of the panels if he chooses to favor the vines over electricity production.

Sun’Agri says these structures are meant to protect crops and support farm income over a 30-year lifespan. Marchal said the cost is about €1 million per hectare. Moreau will receive about €60 a month in rent, though he could have chosen to invest in the project company instead and receive dividends.

One limitation remains: under current rules, Moreau can only produce wine without geographic indication on this plot, even though he says he is following the specifications required by the Bureau national interprofessionnel du cognac. He hopes regulations will change quickly enough to allow wider use of this technology in vineyards.