

VentureBeat

CleanTech

Another massive funding for thin film solar, with \$104M to AVA Solar, a challenger to First Solar

[Chris Morrison](#) | August 28th, 2008

AVA SOLAR It may not be as much as the [colossal \\$300 million financing](#) that [Nanosolar](#) finally disclosed yesterday — the biggest ever for a solar company — but another thin-film manufacturer, [AVA Solar](#), has broken into the nine-figure funding range today, with a challenge to industry giant [First Solar's](#) dominance.

AVA stands out a bit from its peers, for several reasons. For one, it's based in Fort Collins, Colorado, well away from the sunny or technology-laden areas its competitors operate in. The outfit has thus gotten relatively little attention. The second oddity is the technology that AVA uses, which builds thin-film cells using cadmium telluride (CdTe), a kind of semiconductor.

Most of the biggest bets in thin-film solar, a form of solar panel that is less efficient than traditional silicon-based cells but much cheaper to make, are based on copper-indium-gallium-selenide, or CIGS technology. [Ascent Solar](#), [Heliovolt](#), [Miasole](#), Nanosolar, and a bunch of other companies all use CIGS. There's an ongoing debate as to whether CIGS, CdTe or a third material, thin-film silicon, is best.

However, CdTe, despite a reputation for being difficult to work with, holds a singular distinction: It's what First Solar, the industry's first and only success, First Solar, uses. It has been reported [that First Solar has no direct competitors](#) in CdTe technology. AVA obviously proves that claim wrong. A handful of others working with CdTe include [Sunovia](#) (OTCBB: SUNV), [Calyxo](#), which is owned by the German giant [Q-Cells](#), and [PrimeStar Solar](#), which recently [sold a majority stake to General Electric Energy](#). Primestar, like AVA, is based in Colorado.

AVA is currently building a plant in Fort Collins, CO, where it promises to employ 500 at a production line that will make 250 megawatts worth of cells a year by 2010. The company appears to use deposition on glass to make its cells, which is also what First Solar uses, although a company spokesman tells me that AVA's technique is "completely different".

A number of well-known venture firms came on for the \$104 million funding. [DCM](#) led, while new investors [Technology Partners](#), [GLG Partners](#) and [Bohemian Companies](#) participated, and previous investor [Invus](#) came back in. AVA raised its seed less than two years ago and took a second funding in June of 2007, but didn't disclose amounts for either of those fundings.

