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### **Solexel Raises \$25 Million for Silicon Gas-Based Solar Panels**

By Andrew Herndon on May 17, 2012

Solexel Inc., a closely held U.S. solar-panel maker that uses silicon gas to manufacture its wafers, received \$25 million to build a pilot plant in California, according to an executive.

New investor Gentry Venture Partners led the financing, which is the first close of Solexel's Series C round, Mark Kerstens, the company's chief sales and marketing officer, said today by telephone. SunPower Corp. (SPWR) ([SPWR](#)), the U.S. solar-panel maker that's 66 percent-owned by Total SA (FP), also was a new investor and participated with existing backers Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, Technology Partners and DAG Ventures LLC, he said.

The pilot is intended to test Solexel's manufacturing process with larger equipment that would be used in a factory planned in Malaysia, according to Kerstens.

"We have already proven that the technology works on the smaller tools," he said. "We will be building out manufacturing capacity to prove scalability."

Solexel, based in Milpitas, California, makes its solar cells using silicon gas instead of growing silicon ingots in furnaces and slicing them into wafers like other companies, according to Kerstens. Those processes are more expensive because more silicon is required and about half of it is wasted, he said.

“We do away with the traditional process of a polysilicon plant,” Kerstens said. “We deposit a gas and we grow every wafer individually, and we can therefore control the thickness,” he said.

## Malaysia Factory

The technology produces cells that are “ultra thin” and more efficient at converting light to electricity than conventional photovoltaic materials, Kerstens said.

He wouldn’t say what the manufacturing capacity of the pilot will be or when production is expected to begin in Malaysia.

Solexel’s 100-acre (405 hectares) site at Senai Hi-Tech Park in southern Malaysia may accommodate a factory capable of making 1 gigawatt of solar panels a year, Kerstens said. It will be developed in stages, beginning with a 200 megawatt-a-year production line that may cost \$275 million, he said. The entire project may require an investment of \$930 million, Solexel said when it was announced in August.

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