



INTERVIEW: IN AUXIN'S WAKE, OMCO SOLAR SEEING LEAP IN AMERICAN MANUFACTURING INTEREST

As one of the only US manufacturers of solar racking and tracking equipment, OMCO Solar is seeing a surge of interest in their proprietary products in the wake of the Auxin tariff investigation.

Even before the federal tariff investigation locked up what OMCO Solar CEO Gary Schuster estimates is 60 percent of the total solar panel imports to the US, OMCO had announced a USD 5m investment to bolster its manufacturing capability for its OMCO Origin solar panel tracking product, which Schuster calls the “culmination” of the last few years of gradual investment to add capacity to the company’s manufacturing capabilities.

Schuster and OMCO’s Director of Business Development Eric Goodwin sat down to talk about the company’s growth trajectory.

A contract manufacturer of solar panel racking and tracking equipment, OMCO has built its solar manufacturing footprint in the US from its first factory in 2009 to four factories with 8 GW of racking systems developed by 2018 in Arizona, Alabama, Indiana and its corporate headquarters of Wickliffe, Ohio.

From there, the firm began developing its own proprietary racking and tracking products, starting with two fixed tilt systems followed by the OMCO Origin tracking system. Since then, the company has deployed another 1.4 GW of products up to today.

Goodwin says the firm is bolstered by a broad mix of different customers including EPCs, developers, municipalities, corporates, module companies, utilities and even landowners. The firm’s customer base includes NextEra and Greenbacker and its relationship with panel manufacturer First Solar “goes back a lot of years” has benefitted both companies’ lead sourcing.

But since the Auxin investigation in particular, Goodwin says the company has seen a surge in growth from both new customers and repeat customers. Unlike overseas manufacturers, Goodwin says the company is able to turn around products ordered within six to eight weeks as opposed to the 26 to 30 weeks Schuster says it can take to source racking products from overseas. Schuster says the company’s ability to customize

designs on the fly has particularly come in handy for developers changing their panel sourcing last minute.

"The tariff situation is leading to an influx of business from customers who are changing panel selection on the fly," Schuster said. "We're really the only racking company that can allow them to do that."

"Ultimately, we can take a lot of risk out of the project," Goodwin added.

Corresponding with OMCO's own growth, Goodwin says the company is seeing a growth in overall US manufacturing, particularly with "some exciting up and coming companies" focused on manufacturing modules. However, he says the maturity of this manufacturing surge will take time, which is something many developers are increasingly short of.

"The question is how fast we can get there, especially when it comes to things like modules and inverters," Goodwin said. "You can't snap your fingers and have a module production line up and running."

Goodwin says he views the ongoing tariff investigation as part of the ongoing trend of US policymakers pushing for a US manufacturing growth, but Schuster argues the uncertainty that goes along with that investigation has been a significantly bigger disruptor for the industry than the tariffs themselves. The availability of panels has gotten so dire in some cases, Goodwin says he's seen situations where customers have contracted for racks with the expectation that they will put in the modules "whenever they can get them."

Until the Department of Commerce makes a definitive decision on its tariff investigation, Goodwin says he sees supply chain issues like these continuing for the near future with potential ramifications including a sustained module and inverter shortage. And while he is pleased about OMCO's individual growth as a manufacturer, he says they are only one piece of the puzzle.

"OMCO is uniquely positioned to still have a lot of growth, but as an industry we need a lot of us to grow and there's definitely some concern there," Goodwin said. "The longer the tariff investigation hangs there, the longer the uncertainty is, especially for tariffs that could be retroactive. That coupled with a module and inverter shortages could have a devastating impact on the industry."

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