

To: Office of Planning and Research
PO Box 3044
1400 Tenth Street, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: California Energy Commission
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Project Applicant: Fiscalini Cheese Company, L.P.

Project Title: Fiscalini's Advanced Renewable Microgrid (FARM)

Project Location - Specific: 7206 Kiernan Ave

Project Location - City: Modesto 95358 Project Location - County: Stanislaus

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The project involves the installation of an on-site renewable energy microgrid at an existing cheese manufacturing and dairy processing facility operated by Fiscalini Cheese Company. The project includes solar photovoltaic generation, a battery energy storage system, electrical switchgear, and a microgrid controller designed to operate behind-the-meter and in coordination with the utility grid. The nature of the project is to upgrade existing electrical infrastructure to improve energy efficiency, reliability, and resilience for continuous food processing operations, including milk handling, cheese production, refrigeration, and packaging. Construction activities will consist of equipment installation, minor trenching, and electrical interconnection within previously disturbed and developed areas of the facility. No expansion of the facility footprint, production capacity, or land use designation will occur as a result of the project.

The purpose of the project is to reduce reliance on grid-supplied electricity, lower peak electrical demand, and decrease greenhouse gas emissions associated with cheese manufacturing operations. The project will also enhance operational resilience by providing backup power during utility outages, thereby protecting temperature-sensitive food products and maintaining compliance with food safety regulations. Energy generated and stored by the microgrid will offset a portion of the facility's annual electricity consumption and reduce exposure to grid disruptions and energy price volatility. The system will also serve the local electric grid by reducing peak demand and improving load management, and the broader community by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and maintaining the reliable operation of a local food manufacturing facility.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: California Energy Commission

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Fiscalini Cheese Company, L.P.

Exempt Status: (check one)

- Ministerial Exemption (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(1); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15268);
Declared Emergency (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(3); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15269(a));
Emergency Project (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(4); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15269(b)(c));
[X] Categorical Exemption. State type and section number

Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15301 ; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15303 ; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15304 ; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15311

- Statutory Exemptions. State code number.
Common Sense Exemption. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §15061(b)(3))

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code. Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.
Fiscalini Cheese Company, L.P.

Reasons why project is exempt:

Class 1 - Existing Facilities (CEQA Guidelines §15301)

This project is exempt under Class 1 because it involves minor alterations to an existing, fully developed cheese manufacturing and dairy processing facility with no expansion of use. Fiscalini Cheese Company is an operating industrial food processing facility, and the project upgrades existing electrical infrastructure by installing a behind-the-meter solar photovoltaic (PV) system, battery energy storage system (BESS), electrical switchgear, and a microgrid controller. The equipment will serve existing processing loads, including refrigeration, milk handling, cheese production, packaging, and related operations. All improvements occur within the existing facility footprint and operational yards, and the project does not increase production capacity, floor area, staffing levels, or hours of operation. Construction activities are limited to equipment installation, electrical interconnection, and minor trenching within paved or previously disturbed areas, resulting in negligible or no expansion of the facility's existing use.

Class 11 - Accessory Structures (CEQA Guidelines §15311)

This project is exempt under Class 11 because it involves the installation of minor, accessory energy infrastructure appurtenant to an existing agricultural facility. The solar PV arrays, battery enclosures, inverters, and electrical cabinets are subordinate to and dependent on the dairy and creamery operations and have no independent use. The system is behind-the-meter and sized to serve on-site electrical loads only; it does not function as a commercial power plant or merchant solar facility. Equipment will be installed within existing operational areas of the site, such as previously disturbed yards or utility areas, and will consist of low-profile solar racking, enclosed battery units, and electrical cabinets mounted on concrete pads. These improvements are similar in scale and function to other accessory utility structures commonly found at agricultural facilities, such as transformers or emergency generators, and therefore meet all criteria of §15311.

Class 3 - New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures (CEQA Guidelines §15303)

This project is exempt under Class 3 because it includes the installation of small, ancillary structures and equipment that support an existing use. The project consists of solar PV panels mounted on racking systems, battery storage enclosures, inverters, transformers, and electrical cabinets, all of which are considered small-scale utility and accessory structures under this exemption. The solar array and battery equipment occupy a limited area relative to the size of the industrial site and are located in developed areas such as operational yards or adjacent to existing structures. No large buildings or habitable structures are proposed. Installation will involve placing prefabricated equipment on concrete pads, mounting PV panels on racking, and connecting electrical components, without substantial site modification. The scale and nature of the structures are consistent with small utility installations contemplated by Class 3.

Class 4 - Minor Alterations to Land (CEQA Guidelines §15304)

This project is exempt under Class 4 because it involves only minor ground disturbance that does not result in significant environmental effects. Construction will require shallow trenching to install underground electrical conduit connecting the solar PV system, BESS, and existing electrical infrastructure. Trenching will occur within previously disturbed and developed areas of the facility, such as paved surfaces or compacted soils in operational yards. Limited grading may be required to level small areas for concrete equipment pads, typically covering a few hundred square feet per pad. No healthy, mature, or scenic trees will be removed, and no native vegetation or agricultural land will be disturbed. All disturbed areas will be restored following construction, and no long-term alteration of landforms will occur.

This project does not involve impacts on any particularly sensitive environment; does not involve any cumulative impacts of successive projects of the same type in the same place that might be considered significant; does not involve unusual circumstances that might have a significant effect on the environment; will not result in damage to scenic resources within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway; the project site is not included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code section 65962.5; and the project will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. Therefore, none of the exceptions to

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code. Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Fiscalini Cheese Company, L.P.

categorical exemptions listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 apply to this project, and this project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Public Agency

Contact Person: Eleanor Oliver **Area code/Telephone/Ext:** 916-232-8181

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: Eleanor Oliver **Date:** 02/17/2026 **Title:** EGSS I

Signed by Public Agency

Signed by Applicant

Date received for filing at OPR: _____