UK solar house places ninth in national competition

By Andy Mead
amead@herald-leader.com

The University of Kentucky's entry in a solar house competition finished ninth among 20 entries from the United States, Canada, Germany, Spain and Puerto Rico.

"For an international competition, that's a very good showing," said Donald Colliver, a biosystems and agricultural engineering professor who was an adviser to the students who worked on the house.

The winner, announced Friday morning, was Team Germany from Technische Universität Darmstadt. Second was the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The UK entry, called S•KY BLUE, featured pixilated photos of Kentucky landscapes, interiors of Kentucky maple and cherry wood, and a solar roof that tilted to catch the sun at the best angle.

The house came in fifth in the net metering category, which measured the amount of electricity it produced compared to how much it pulled from the grid.

Gregory Luhan, an associate dean for research in the College of Design, said one thing that set the UK house apart from the others is that team members chose to cook meals in the house instead of having catered food brought in.

"We actually used it as if it were a typical on-grid home in Kentucky," he said.

Lexington Mayor Jim Newberry was on hand to congratulate the UK team after the results were announced.

"I think they are justifiably very proud," he said. "What an accomplishment for these students and for the university."

The competition was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy.

The houses have been on display on the National Mall.

The UK house will be taken apart and brought back to the campus. Next year, it will begin a new life as part of the visitors center for the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.