

Connections

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 24, Issue 11

Electricity remains good value

Consider how important electricity is to your life. Electricity is likely involved with every aspect of your day-to-day living: cooking food, hot water, entertainment, comfort, livelihood and more. How does one put a price on that?

That is the question electric cooperatives must answer when they assign value to the electrons flowing through the power lines, to your home, and into the devices that you rely on for modern life. The answer is part art and part science, especially considering the broad shifts in the power industry in the past decade:

- Grid modernization
- Advanced metering
- Government regulations and power portfolio requirements
- Stagnant sales
- The rise of renewables and energy efficiency
- The emergence of more knowledgeable consumers who have better tools to monitor and control their use of electricity

Four principles can be considered when putting a value on electricity.

1. An electric cooperative's rate structure should collect adequate revenue from the members to cover the costs of providing them with electricity. These costs range from generation to transmission to the local distribution system to answering phones at the electric co-op office.

Charging your phone for a year



Electricity remains a great value, courtesy of your electric cooperative.

2. As consumers of different classes are added or lost, the costs of their power, energy, demand and consumer service must be recovered.

3. A cooperative's rate design should be understandable to its members and motivate them to use electricity wisely, which helps reduce current and future costs. For example, demand charges help members be conscious of creating demand peaks.

4. Electric rates should be revised as needed to clearly communicate the cooperative's changing revenue requirements to its members.

At the end of the day, putting a value on safe, reliable and affordable electricity must meet one basic requirement — the value needs to cover the fixed costs of making that electricity available to members.

This is generally done with a combination of service cost, kilowatt-hour (kWh) sales and demand recovery. So, what is included in the monthly service cost whether you use one kilowatt hour or 1,000 kilowatt hours?

- Wires, poles and transformers necessary to bring power to your home, farm or business
- Substations
- Meter purchase costs and depreciation
- Digger trucks, bucket trucks and other equipment necessary to build and maintain line
- Overhead and underground maintenance costs
- Interest costs, insurance, plant depreciation, property taxes and miscellaneous fixed costs

Based on BCREA's most recent cost of service study, the amount to cover those fixed costs for a single-phase service is around \$85. Currently, Brown County REA is working to gradually merge the rates between members formerly served by Alliant Energy and pre-existing Brown County REA service territory.

— **Continued on Page 6**

At A Glance



**Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association**

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your ability to pay your electric bill?

Extra energy-assistance funding is available, but must apply ASAP. If you live in Brown, Blue Earth, Nicollet, Sibley or Watonwan counties, call Minnesota Valley Action Council at 800-767-7139; Cottonwood, Redwood or Renville counties contact United Community Action Partnership at 800-658-2448. ☎



Taking time to consider home office energy efficiency does 'compute'

Many people are working from home these days. This may save energy on a national level (because people are not commuting and populating offices) but on a personal level, staying at home increases energy bills for individuals. People are using their home office equipment and computers a lot more. This is why it is important to consider home office energy efficiency.

To get the most energy efficiency out of your computer, start with getting the right model. Energy Star computers use 30-65 percent less energy than their non-Energy Star counterparts.

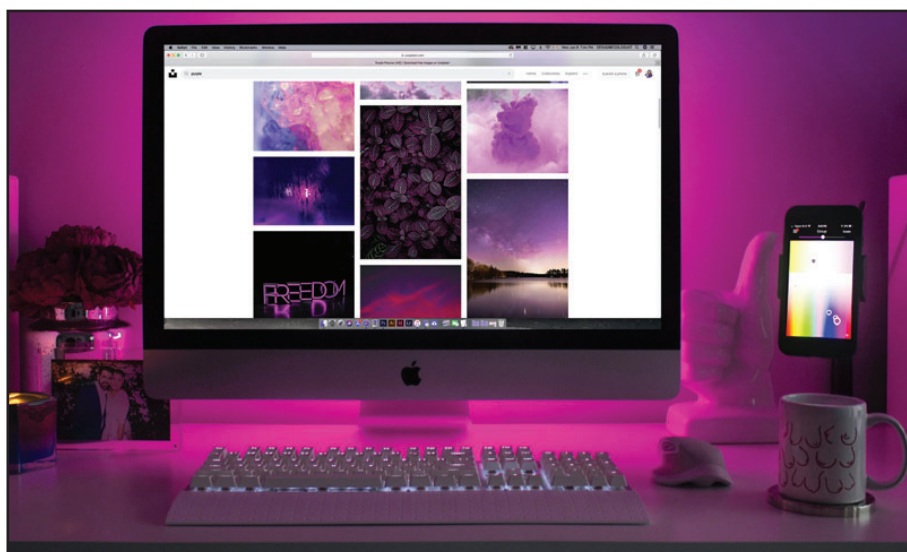
When using computers in your home, follow these energy-saving tips for additional savings:

Should you turn off your computer or leave it running to save energy? This question comes up because many people believe it takes more energy to start a computer than leave it on. While a small surge of energy occurs when a computer starts up, this small amount of energy is still less than the energy used when a computer is running for long periods of time.

Another reason some people leave their computers on is they believe turning them on and off frequently will wear them out faster.

The truth of the matter is that most computers reach the end of their "useful" life due to advances in technology; this is long before the effects of being switched on and off multiple times have a negative impact on their service life.

At the end of the day the less time a computer is on, the less energy is used. In addition, running computers produce heat. Turning them off also



An energy-efficient computer can keep your home office in the pink and help keep your utility bills from going in the red.

reduces a home's cooling loads.

If you still prefer to leave your computer running, follow these guidelines:

- Turn off the monitor if you aren't going to use your PC for more than 20 minutes.
- Turn off both the CPU and monitor if you're not going to use your PC for more than two hours.
- Make sure your monitors, printers, and other accessories are on a power strip/surge protector. When this equipment is not in use for extended periods, turn off the switch on the power strip to prevent them from drawing power even when shut off. If you don't use a power strip, unplug extra equipment when it's not in use.

It is not uncommon for electronics to draw a small amount of power even when "off." Energy Star monitors consume one watt or less when off

and two watts or less in sleep mode.

One should also note that screen savers are not "energy" savers. Using a screen saver may use more energy than not using one. Furthermore, a computer's power-down feature may not work if you have a screen saver activated.

Most computers come with such power management features. Energy Star estimates that using these features will save you up to \$30 each year. Make sure you have the power-management feature set up on your PC through your operating system software. Spending a large portion of time in low-power mode not only saves energy, but helps equipment run cooler and last longer. ^(E)

— Information from energystar.gov

Whiten your teeth at home with the power of LEDs!

Do your teeth need more than a cleaning every six months to keep them at their whitest?

The Phoebe At-Home LED Teeth Whitening Light gives you the ability to keep your teeth white all year long!

Instead of using whitening gel-strips alone, the Phoebe harnesses the power of LED lights, along with whitening strips (sold separately), to keep your teeth their brightest. Plus, the use of LED light, rather than UV light, is safer. Unlike UV light, LED light does not affect tissue on a cellular level. This teeth whitener uses 16 LED bulbs to serve as a catalyst to deliver the right amount of whitening agent into your teeth.

At-home teeth whitening light can be very effective when used correctly. It can help reduce coffee, wine, smoking and soda stains on your teeth in




The Phoebe At Home Teeth Whitening Light can help you reduce teeth stains in the comfort of your easy chair, instead of the dentist's office.

approximately 30 minutes. The Phoebe Teeth Whitener even allows you to use it as a touch up for a last-minute

arrangement, without waiting for an appointment time at the dentist. Comprehensive instructions will help you see results straight away on a schedule that works for you.

Other features of the LED teeth whitener include:

- The teeth whitener is powered by your phone. Its adapter is compatible with iPhone, Android and USB. No need for batteries. Simply plug it into your phone and whiten your teeth.
- Programmed timer reminds you of the using time.
- Using anytime and anywhere while reading, watching TV or traveling.
- The mouthpiece is made from flexible food-grade silicone and will fit each mouth.
- The Phoebe At-Home Teeth Whitener Light is available on Amazon.com for approximately \$20. 

Safety

May your holidays be merry, bright...and safe!

According to the National Fire Protection Association, 860 home fires caused by holiday decorations occur each year. An additional 210 home fires are caused by Christmas trees per year.

Avoid being part of the statistics. Follow these steps to ensure you decorate your home safely.

- Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations are marked for proper use.

• Outdoor electrical lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs).

- Inspect all lights, decorations, and extension cords for damage before using.

- Exercise caution when decorating near power lines, especially



Keep your home safe for Santa's visit this holiday season! Avoid using holiday decorations in haphazard ways.

secondary lines coming into your home. It is easy to overlook them when moving and climbing on ladders. Keep yourself and your equipment at least 10 feet from these power lines.

- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.


- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices. They can overheat and cause a fire.

- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together.

- Water your Christmas tree daily to keep it from drying out.

- Keep all decorations at least three feet away from heating equipment or an open flame, like a fireplace or candles.

- Purchase electrical decorations from reputable retailers, which are approved by a national recognized testing lab, such as UL.

Your electric cooperative wishes your holidays to be merry, bright and safe! 

— **Information courtesy of esfi.org**

Brown County Briefs

Member Advisory Council postponed until 2021



Just a reminder to members who agreed to serve on the Member Advisory Council in 2020 that the council will not be meeting until 2021. You will receive notice by mail once the meeting date is set.

Check out our new website

New look, same web address! We are pleased to announce the launch of our new website at www.browncountyrea.coop. Check out some of the new functionality and features.



Office closed

Our office remains temporarily closed to the public. If you need to conduct business that can't be done remotely, please call 800-658-2368 to make an appointment. Please continue to pay your electric bill using the drop box and other options. The outer front doors are now unlocked to allow members to pick up calendars, drop off holiday lights and donations to Santa's Closet. The entrance beyond that point is by appointment only.

Energy efficiency tip

Keep cold air out to save energy. Seal air leaks around pipes and any gaps around chimneys and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.



2021 calendars available

Pick up your 2021 large, farm pocket calendars (one per member please) in the entry of the REA headquarters. There are also a small number of pocket-size calendars available to members, while supplies last. ☎

Member enjoys electrified ride



BCREA member Heather Hoffmann says she loves owning and driving her new plug-in hybrid minivan. She was impressed by the number of EV chargers in prime parking spots at hotels during a trip to Duluth shortly after taking delivery of the vehicle.

Since purchasing a Plug-in Hybrid Chrysler Pacifica minivan, Brown County REA members Andrew and Heather Hoffmann have been learning about their new vehicle. Being the first known plug-in electric vehicle in the REA service territory, it has been a learning experience for the co-op as well.

The Hoffmanns took delivery of their new van in early September. Soon after, Heather ordered a Level 2 charger through Great River Energy's Energy Wise MN store to re-charge the van's battery more quickly than with the 120-volt charger included. They received some attractive rebates from BCREA on the charger, which was installed in their garage. They can also charge the van with 100 percent wind energy at no extra cost, since enrolling in the Revolt program.

Contact BCREA to learn about these options and more if you're considering the purchase of a plug-in electric vehicle. ☎

Recycle holiday lights



Are you upgrading your holiday lighting to LEDs? Remember to recycle the old lights!

Brown County REA is again working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect old holiday lights to be recycled. You may drop off old lights in the box in the office entry during regular business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). The collection begins November 23 and runs through January 15.

Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box. ☎



Brown County REA headquarters is again a collection site for your donations of unwrapped toys, books, hats and mittens to be used as part of the Santa's Closet project, which provides Christmas gifts to area children who may not otherwise receive gifts.

Drop off donations in the REA office entry, M-F, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. before December 11. Thank you for your generosity to those less fortunate!

BCREA offers many ways to pay

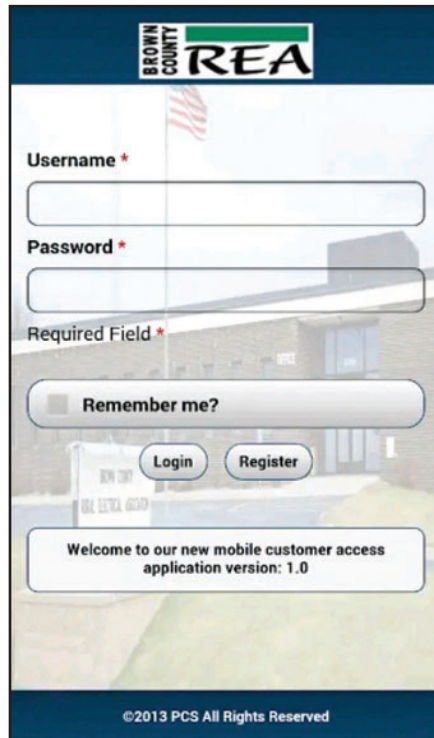
When it comes to paying your electric bill each month, Brown County REA offers many choices. Choose the one that works best for you.

Automatic payment from bank

You can have your monthly electric bill payment automatically transferred from your checking or savings account to BCREA on the 20th of each month and never worry about being late with your payment. If the 20th falls on a weekend or holiday, the transfer will be made the following business day. You continue to receive a monthly statement from BCREA. To enroll, fill out and submit the form on our website or contact the office to receive the form. You will also need to provide a voided check from your checking account or a deposit slip from your savings account. BCREA is planning a promotion and drawing for a chance to win electric bill credits for members who currently pay using this payment method and any members who enroll before January 31, 2021. Watch for details in the December *Connections* and in your December bill.

Online bill pay

Sign up and begin securely paying your REA bill online by visiting our website at www.browncountyrea.coop. To take advantage of the free, convenient and easy-to-use option, click on the *Pay Bill Online* tab on the



Use the BCREA mobile app to pay your bill quickly and easily.

Visit the website's home page. Login or register if it is your first time visiting the portal. Follow the onscreen instructions to create your account. You may enter multiple account numbers. You can also choose a paperless bill, sign up for recurring payments and more.

Mobile app

Access account information and pay your bill using a smart phone or

tablet with Brown County REA's mobile customer access app. Download free by searching *Brown County REA* in the Apple or Google App store. If you already have an online account in the BCREA Online Portal, use that login. If not, create a unique user id and password at the login screen to establish your account information.

Secure phone payment line

Pay your bill using a credit or debit through our secure phone payment line. You can still call the office toll free at 800-658-2368, local at 507-794-3331, and then be transferred to the payment line, or call directly at 877-885-7968. You will need to know your BCREA account number and the amount due.

Credit card

Contact the office or visit BCREA's website for a form to authorize recurring payment of your bill from a specified credit card. Payment will be taken from your credit card on the 20th of each month. Credit card payments are limited to \$2,000 per month.

Check or cash

And as always, we accept checks or cash to pay your monthly bill as well. Just remember to pay by the 20th of each month to avoid late fees. With the office still closed, we ask you to please use the drop box near the flagpole to drop off payments. ☺

BCREA welcomes new office manager



Jennifer Rose has joined the team at Brown County REA as its new office manager.

A native of Bird Island, Jennifer graduated from BOLD High School. She attended Moorhead State University for two years and completed her education at Mankato State University. She earned a Bachelor of Science

degree with majors in accounting and corporate finance. She worked as a staff accountant for Casey Menden

& Company, P.A. in Bloomington for two years before being hired as the Business Manager for River Bend Education District, New Ulm. She worked at River Bend for 23 years before coming to the REA.

Jennifer and her husband, Scott, live in rural Sleepy Eye, where he farms and finishes hogs for Schwartz Farms, Inc. They have three daughters: Taylor, Maddison and Paige.

Jennifer serves on the Cedar Mountain School Board and as Board Treasurer for the Redwood Area Junior Olympic Volleyball Association. Outside of work, she enjoys reading, scrapbooking and attending her daughters' activities. Welcome Jennifer! ☺

The cooperative goal is to provide reliable electricity service at cost

— Continued from Page 1

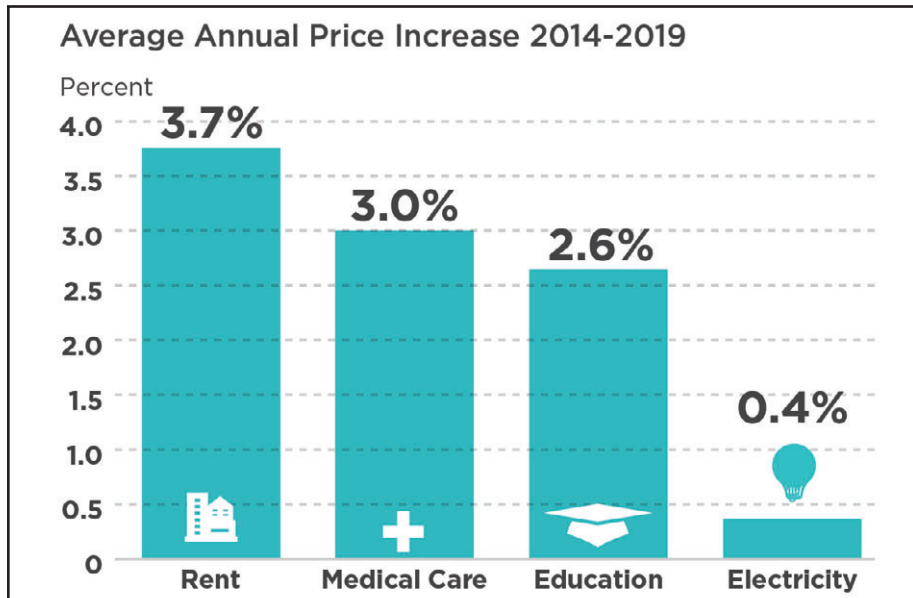
Keep in mind electric cooperatives are not-for-profit organizations. Their rates must be based on actual costs of serving members, not actual costs, plus profit. At the same time a cooperative needs to generate a profit or margin to remain financially strong. These margins are used for future growth and construction. Once the margins have served their purpose, they are then returned to the members in the form of capital credits.

This is where putting a value on electricity becomes part art and part science.

What is the right balance on finding the appropriate service charge for each class of member?

What value ensures the ability to have electricity, regardless of how much electricity is used at each location each month?

What is the appropriate kilowatt rate for that power that generates healthy margins for the good of the cooperative and its members in the future?



The cost of powering your home rises slowly when compared to other common expenses. Looking at price increases over the last five years, it's easy to see electricity remains a good value! Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Consumer Price Index

The answer to each of these questions varies for each electric cooperative based on their demographics and individual circumstances. Yet, the

goal is the same for each electric cooperative — serving our members with safe, reliable, affordable electricity in the best possible way. (E)



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We're not barking up the wrong tree...share almond bark recipes

The holidays are not complete without almond bark treats. Share your almond bark recipes, whether it's used for peanut butter cups, peanut butter cracker cookies, on popcorn, pretzels or cereal! Send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by November 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Bacon-Wrapped Sweet Potato Bites by Nancy Katzer, Fairmont

¼ c. butter, melted 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled & cut into 1" cubes
 ½ tsp. salt 1 lb. bacon strips, cut in half
 ½ tsp. cayenne pepper ½ c. brown sugar
 ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

In a large bowl mix butter and seasonings. Add sweet potatoes and toss to coat. Wrap one piece bacon around each sweet potato cube, secure with a toothpick. Dip each side in brown sugar. Place on a parchment paper lined 15x10x1" baking pan. Bake around 40 minutes at 350° or until bacon is crisp and sweet potatoes are tender.

Option: can serve bites with warm maple syrup as a dip. ☺

Sweet Potatoes & Apple Bake by Diana Lee Schaefer, New Ulm

2 cans (18 oz.) vacuum-packed sweet potatoes, sliced OR cook 2 large sweet potatoes and slice ½ c. firmly-packed brown sugar
 3 medium Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and sliced
 ½ c. butter or margarine 8 oz. can crushed pineapple
 1 tsp. cinnamon ½ c. chopped pecans

Layer 1 can or 1 sweet potato and half the apples in bottom of buttered 7x11" glass baking dish. Combine the margarine or butter with the brown sugar and cinnamon until mixture crumbles. Sprinkle over the apple layer. Layer the remaining sweet potatoes and apple slices. Top with the can of pineapple and sprinkle with pecans. (Fresh cranberries can be added for color). Bake in preheated 375° oven until heated through about 25 to 30 minutes.

Serves 8 to 10 people. ☺

Butternut Squash Bake by Gloria Martin, Welcome

1/3 c. butter
 ¾ c. sugar
 2 eggs
 12 oz. can evaporated milk
 2 c. cooked, mashed squash.

Topping:

½ c. Rice Krispies cereal
 ¼ c. brown sugar
 ¼ c. pecans, chopped
 2 T. butter, melted

Bake uncovered in 11x7x2" pan at 350° for 45 minutes.

Sprinkle the topping over the dish and then return to oven for another 10 minutes. ☺

**Pick up the phone
 before the shovel;
 call before digging!**

1-800-252-1166



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺





Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
Website: www.browncountyrea.coop
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368
Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
David Wendinger — 276-3166
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
James Mickelson, 794-6298
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



Jennifer Rose
Office Manager

Staff Notes

YOU get the credit! Brown County REA retires \$699,378 to members

It's time for you to get the credit — capital credits, that is — for helping build, sustain and grow your local electric cooperative. This year Brown County REA is retiring \$699,378 to members like you served by the co-op.

When you signed up to receive electric service from Brown County REA, you became a member of an electric utility. While investor-owned utilities return a portion of any profits back to their shareholders, electric co-ops operate on an at-cost basis. Brown County REA allocates and annually retires capital credits, also called patronage dividends, based on how much electricity you purchased during a year.

If you were a Brown County REA member from 1987-1989, 2000-2003 and 2019, you will receive capital credits payments reflecting your contribution of capital to, and ownership of, the cooperative during those years. That may seem like a long time ago. However, those funds helped us manage rates, reduced the amount of money we needed to borrow from outside lenders to build, maintain and expand a reliable electric distribution system, along with covering emergency expenses.

At the October 29 board meeting, Brown County REA's Board of Directors approved the payment of approximately \$699,378 in patronage dividends to its members. This amount is broken down as 100 percent of 2000-2002, 62 percent of 2003 and 20 percent of 2019.

For the second time now, our wholesale power supplier Great River Energy has also retired capital credits back to the cooperative. Brown county REA will pass along this retirement to the membership, retiring 100 percent of G&T capital credits from the years 1987-1988 and 72 percent of 1989.

With this retirement Brown County REA has returned a cumulative total, since 1958, of more than \$17,318,838. Through 2019, the percentage of patronage capital retired to co-op members stood at 49.33 percent, which ranks your cooperative third in the state of Minnesota and 31st out of 708 cooperatives nationwide.

Look for your share of the capital credits retirement in your mailbox in mid-December. This year, checks will not be issued in amounts less than \$100. These amounts will be credited to the December electric bill of current members. For former members, capital credits checks will be issued in future years when the balance reaches at least \$100.

Returning capital credits to members is a practice unique to the cooperative form of business and represents one of the cooperative principles — members' economic participation.

Perhaps best of all, the benefits of this economic participation return to our local communities! (U)

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on October 29, 2020 in the Brown County REA auditorium in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the September 2020 Board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved September 2020 payroll and August 2020 financial statements.
- Reviewed and approved the payment of approximately \$699,378 in capital credits to members.
- Approved the cooperative's 2019 Form 990 for filing with the Internal Revenue Service.
- Reviewed recent line crew safety training
- Updated on construction activities coming to an end for the year.
- Reviewed and approved the 2020-2021 wage schedule.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting will be on November 24, 2020 at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. (U)