

Connections

September 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 9

Electric co-ops cooperate for Farmfest displays on safety & energy-efficiency

One of the co-op principles is education. Farmfest, near Redwood Falls August 6-8, is a great location to meet and educate our rural members.

Your electric co-op partnered with more than 12 southern and central Minnesota electric cooperatives to share a Farmfest booth in one of the large tents. This year's booth featured electric yard tools demonstrating ways to work "smarter" with new electrical battery technology.

Plus, this year cooperatives partnered to expand electrical safety education. "The idea behind the event was to talk about farm safety around electricity and to spread the word about safety when using large machinery or farming," stated Anthony Lenz, Director of Safety Services, from the Minnesota Rural Electric Association. "Our booth was designed to spread awareness of high-voltage exposure to people and machinery in various situations: equipment around overhead powerlines, powerlines contacting a vehicle or equipment, digging around underground powerlines and many other scenarios. We hope to move it to a much heavier-traveled section of the event next year and increase foot traffic and awareness for electrical hazards." Ⓜ



Zap! Brown County REA linemen Tyler Jensen and Brady Kerkhoff demonstrated electrical safety scenarios at an outdoor Farmfest booth with full-sized equipment. While Great River Energy donated the booth, several vendors and electric co-ops, like BCREA, donated the line crews, signage, safety trailer and handouts.



Congratulations to the 2024 Farmfest booth prize winners:

1. Ice Auger — Andy Peterson, Lamberton, Redwood Electric Cooperative
2. Backpack Blower — Ron Post, Willmar, Kandiyohi Power Cooperative
3. Shop Vac — Ron Mortensen, Hector, McLeod Co-op Power
4. Pole Saw — Wayne Wels, New Ulm, Brown County REA
5. Chain Saw — Randy Ascheman, Appleton, Agralite Co-op Ⓜ

At A Glance



**Rate change
takes effect
September 1**

Members are reminded that the rate adjustments went into effect on September 1. Changes will be reflected on the October bill for September usage, to be paid by October 20. Ⓜ



Smart-home technology captures energy efficiency to move to the head of the class

Smart-home technologies are transforming how we live, making our homes more comfortable, convenient and energy efficient than ever before.

Smart-home technologies are devices that communicate with each other to automate everyday tasks and functions around the home, like heating and cooling, lighting and security. Besides convenience, smart technologies enable consumers to manage and monitor their energy consumption through device scheduling and control.

With just a tap on your phone or a voice command to your virtual assistant (like Alexa or Siri), you can conveniently control many aspects of your home environment. If you're new to the smart tech world, several cost-effective devices allow you to make your home smarter.

One of the best and most inexpensive places to start is with a smart bulb or plug. Smart LED bulbs allow you to control home lighting remotely through a smartphone app or voice commands. You can set schedules to automatically turn lights off or on, which can help you save energy and boost home security.

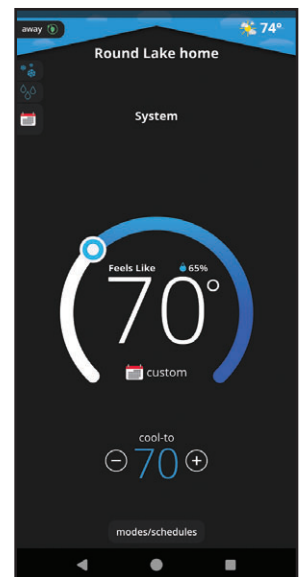
Smart plugs are another inexpensive way to give electronics and small appliances the smart-home treatment. Smart plugs allow you to set schedules and remotely control power to lamps, small appliances and electronics, minimizing standby energy consumption and maximizing convenience. For example, you can sync the timing of your bedside lamp, alarm, speakers and coffee maker to turn on at the same time each morning.

If Alexa or Siri is already part of your home, you can build on your existing "tech ecosystem" by adding a smart hub, like Amazon Echo or Apple HomePod. Voice assistants that are synced to smart devices, like bulbs and plugs, provide additional options for device management and allow family members to interact with the various devices through voice control, rather than individual apps.

Home heating and cooling account for a significant portion of energy use, so one of the best investments you can make in smart tech is a smart thermostat. While traditional programmable thermostats can be set to your schedule and preferences, a smart thermostat takes this one step further




A Smart thermostat allows you to use your wall thermostat (above) or cell phone (right) to turn your home's temperature up or down when you are away. That way it's the perfect temp when you return home. Otherwise, set it up on a schedule or even adjust the temp from the comfort of your bed. Save more with the co-op's rebate too!



by learning and adjusting to your routine and building a schedule with it. Your electric co-op offers a \$25 Energy Star Smart thermostat rebate. Find the form on the co-op's website.

Smart security systems are popular options for homeowners looking for advanced security solutions that incorporate cameras, sensors and cloud-based video recordings. As with other smart technologies, smart security systems provide convenient, flexible ways to monitor homes (and businesses), giving you peace of mind even when you're away. Heartland Security, a subsidiary of your electric cooperative, can help you get started. See their ad on Page 7 for contact information or visit www.heartlandss.com.

If you're considering smart tech for your home, start by defining your goals. Is saving energy your top priority or are you aiming to improve home security? Smart home technologies provide great convenience, but remember, they are internet-connected devices. You'll need a stable Wi-Fi connection to ensure devices are working properly, and you'll need strong passwords for your router and individual devices.

Whether you're looking to automate every aspect of your home or simply want to try a device or two, smart technologies have the power to transform your living space into a home where comfort and convenience reign supreme. 

You'll be a fan of this rechargeable, portable fan/light

Be cool on the go! Whether you are headed to a steamy baseball game, camping, picnic or working outside, bring a gentle breeze with you to keep the bugs away or stay cool!

The eight-inch swivel fan (pointed up, down or in between) can be used for eight to 36 hours on a single charge. An indicator light shows the battery's status. The USB cord charges it in five to six hours, while being used. A high-performance brushless motor adds to the efficiency of the variable-fan speed. Use the fold-up hook on the bottom to hang it from the tent pole or tree branch.

You'll be "blown" away by other features too! It doubles as a three-level LED light. Adding to its functionality, use the fan's battery to recharge your cell phone. The durable anti-drop plastic can handle being portable (about 9 inches wide and 10 inches tall).

Other uses could include while working outside when making repairs, while husking sweet corn, on the deck or it's even small enough to sit by your computer.

Find different brands on Amazon for \$20-\$35. Of course, if you have power tools using rechargeable batteries, check



"Chillaxing" takes on a whole process with a rechargeable fan! It's also features a hook under the base to hang it and LED light on top too! Perfect for camping, work or hot ball games! Recharge it with a USB cord for eight to 36 hours of a "fan"tastic breeze.

out that product's lineup for a portable, but probably larger and more expensive fan.

Keep your cool wherever you go! ☺

Harvest safety tips for safe fall fieldwork

Drive your farm equipment with a safety first focus. Reduce the risk of an electrical contact accident. We want you to go home to your family safe and sound each night.

1. Look up before entering the field and going under power lines. Maintain at least a 10-foot distance from power lines when operating equipment like grain augers and other tall equipment.
2. When doing fall tillage around the edge of the field by the power lines, look out for guy wires, poles and green padmount cabinets too. Drive slowly near this equipment!
3. Use a spotter to safely navigate around power lines and other electrical equipment.
4. Ensure all farm workers are trained on electrical safety procedures.
5. Regularly inspect all equipment and machinery for signs of wear and damage.
6. Keep first aid kits and emergency contact numbers in an easily accessible location.
7. If you become tangled with power lines or other equipment, stay inside. Call the cooperative. Stepping outside onto the platform could mean stepping onto energized metal and risks electrocution.
8. If you must exit the equipment due to fire, jump as far away as you can with your feet together to avoid shock. ☺



Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

Now is the time to schedule annual maintenance for your home's heating system. During fall months, HVAC technicians are typically less busy, making this an excellent time for maintenance and any necessary repairs before the winter months. A qualified technician can clean filters, check for leaks and ensure all system components are working efficiently to keep your home cozy and warm when the temperatures begin to drop.

Member Advisory Council meets

The Member Advisory Council members meet Monday, September 9, beginning with a light meal at 6 p.m. Details were mailed to current members.

Backup heat ready for season?

Brown County REA members with a Dual Fuel Heating System (electric heat or a heat pump with non-electric backup) are reminded to make sure your back-up heating system is in working order and that you have adequate fuel supply.

- Dual Fuel Heating Systems are usually controlled during periods of high demand (such as frigid winter evenings), but other factors, such as high wholesale energy prices or system emergencies, can lead to load control as well.

- Participants' primary electric heating system can be controlled up to 12 hours per day and up to 400 hours per heating season.

- Both morning and evening control is expected throughout the cold winter months.

- Control schedules at individual receivers will be randomly staggered by up to 30 minutes. Ⓢ

Your change benefits the many local groups through Operation Round Up



Sleepy Eye Medical Center CEO and Administrator Todd Consbruck and Wende Davis, RN, BSN, Cardiac Rehab Manager, far right, accept a \$500 for enhancements to the hospital's cardiac services from Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board Treasurer Bonnie Seidl, second from left, and BCREA's Marcia Solie.

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board distributed a total of \$2,050 to four organizations and one individual in the BCREA service area at its meeting August 19.

Funds were awarded to Cindy Jensen for SkillsUSA National competition travel expenses, SWWC Foundation for Innovation in Education, Springfield PAWS, Sleepy Eye Healthcare Foundation cardiac program enhancements and NUMAS Haus.

Donations are made possible through the generosity of REA members whose electric bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar each month. For example, if your bill is \$95.52, you pay \$96. The 48-cent difference is placed in the Round Up Trust account and distributed quarterly to worthy causes throughout the cooperative's service area. For less than \$12 per year you can help make a difference in the local area. Your contributions are tax deductible.

The Trust Board will meet again November 19. Organizations interested in applying for funding through the Round Up Trust can request an application from trust board members Pat Roiger, Ann Parker, Kim Hensch, Betsy Holm, Rosie Schwartz, Brian Hacker, Bonnie Seidl, Jessie Beranek or Mike Rein. Applications are also available on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop; click Operation Round Up under the Programs & Services tab. Otherwise, call the office at 800-658-2368. Ⓢ

Adding load this fall or an electric vehicle?



Are you planning to install, modify or replace electric equipment this fall at your home, business or farm? Purchasing an electric vehicle and adding a charger? If so, please contact Brown County REA with the details of your project as soon as possible.

By contacting the cooperative, we can ensure:

- Our equipment is sized to handle your new project.

- You and your neighbors will not experience power quality issues, as a result of the additional load.
- The work to be completed is efficiently scheduled to eliminate delays.
- Your project costs are kept to a minimum.

By working together, we can help your project go as smoothly as possible. If you have questions regarding your electrical installation or modification, please call Brown County REA at 794-3331 or 800-658-2368. Ⓢ

Rate adjustment, effective September 1, 2024				
Service Description	Current Service Charge	New Service Charge	Current Energy Charge	New Energy Charge
Residential	\$42	\$52	\$.095/kWh	\$.1020*/kWh
Three-Phase	\$65	\$75	\$.095/kWh	\$.1020/kWh
Large Power	\$70	\$80	\$.077/kWh	\$.084/kWh
Large Power Demand			\$7.20/kW	\$7.75/kW

* Former Alliant Energy members current rates will be merged to this rate. All seasonal and step rates will be eliminated.



Wayne Wels, rural New Ulm, was the lucky winner of the EGO Pole Saw at the Minnesota Touchstone Energy Cooperatives' 2024 Farmfest booth. Thanks to all who visited the booth. 📷



Comfrey Mayor Gary Richter, center left, and Council Member Wayne Redman, center right, were presented a rebate check for the LED lighting retrofit project by Director Jim Hanson, far right, and CEO Mike Heidemann. 📷

Thanks for attending Coffee with the Co-op!



Brown County REA directors and staff made the rounds to Comfrey, Hanska, Essig and Gibbon to connect with members during July and August. Board President Tom Hayes visited with members at Sweet Sisters Bakery in Hanska, left photo. Director Greg Mages passed around donuts to a group gathered at Carl's Corner in Essig. 📷



Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule does not stop winter disconnects; know the process

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule does not completely stop winter disconnects.

In accordance with Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule, electric service cannot be disconnected for nonpayment between October 1 and April 30 if electricity is the primary heat source and ALL of the following apply:

1. Your household income is at or below 50 percent of the state median household income. Income may be verified on forms provided by your electric cooperative or by the local energy-assistance provider.

2. You enter into and make reasonable timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household.

3. You receive referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce your energy bills from your electric co-op.

Winter disconnects may occur

Before disconnecting electric service to residential members between October 1 and April 30,

Your electric cooperative must provide:

1. A 30-day notice of disconnection;
2. A statement of members' rights and responsibilities;
3. A list of local energy-assistance providers;
4. Forms on which to request Cold Weather Rule protection; and
5. A statement explaining available payment plans and other options to continue service.

Energy Assistance Program

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which helps low-income renters and homeowners pay for home heating costs and furnace repairs. Household income must be at or below 50 percent of the state median income to qualify for benefits. Applications must be received or postmarked by May 31, 2025.



Des Moines Valley Human Services (Jackson & Cottonwood)	507-847-4000
Martin County Human Services	507-238-4757
MN Dept. of Commerce (Ask for fuel assistance)	1-800-657-3710
Minnesota Valley Action Council	1-800-767-7139
Blue Earth County	507-345-6822
Brown County	507-508-4041
Martin County	507-238-1663
Nicollet County	507-934-5224
Sibley County	507-237-2981
Watonwan County	507-375-5748
Nobles County Community Services	888-807-8099
Renville County	320-523-1842
Salvation Army's Heat Share (Jackson, Martin & Brown Co.)	1-800-842-7279
Sibley County Human Services	507-237-4000
SW Health & Human Services (Redwood Co.)	1-888-234-1292
SW MN Opportunity Council, Inc. (Nobles Co.)	507-376-4195
United Community Action Partnership (Jackson, Cottonwood & Redwood Counties)	1-800-992-1710

To learn more about the EAP program or to apply for assistance:

- Visit the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Assistance website: <https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance> for more details.
- Contact your county's energy assistance provider for additional information and assistance.

Your electric cooperative exists because of you; we are dedicated to the people and communities we serve. If you are having difficulty paying your electric bill and do not qualify for either

of these programs, please contact the cooperative to set up a payment plan. ☎

2025 Minnesota Income Eligibility

Household size	1 month maximum guidelines
1 person	\$2,983
2 people	\$3,901
3 people	\$4,819
4 people	\$5,737

Dump some pumpkin recipes on us! Share your family favorites

How do you pumpkin spice your fall recipes? Share your favorite pumpkin recipes with us, whether for muffins, pie, dessert, bread and more. Send your favorite pumpkin recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by September 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☎️

Active military bill payment options exist



Minnesota law offers active military personnel additional payment options for their electric bills. The law covers disconnection, payment arrangements, appeal and an annual notice to co-op members. Similar to the state's Cold Weather Rule, an application must be completed and income guidelines exist. It's available for military personnel with active duty, deployed or a permanent duty station change.

Call or e-mail us for details about the active duty military payment options and a form to sign up. ☎️

Slow Cooker Root Beer BBQ Ribs by Jean Beckendorf, Welcome

- 2 lb. pork ribs
- 1 c. root beer
- 1 c. BBQ sauce
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. onion powder
- salt & pepper

Season the ribs with the garlic and onion powder, along with salt and pepper. Place the seasoned ribs in a slow cooker.

In a bowl mix the root beer and BBQ sauce together; pour over the ribs. Cover and cook six to eight hours on low or three to four hours on high until fully cooked and tender. ☎️

Green Tomato Salsa by Barb Sellner, Sleepy Eye

- 10 c. chopped green tomatoes
- 4 c. chopped onion
- 2 c. chopped green or red peppers
- 2 T. hot pepper flakes
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 c. cilantro
- 1 c. lime juice
- ½ c. vinegar
- 1 T. canning salt
- ½ T. cumin
- 1 T. oregano
- 2 T. sugar

Mix all together. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Process in boiling water for 15 minutes in pint jars. Makes nine or more pints of salsa. ☎️

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 with three-year monitoring agreement

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 Subsidiary of your local electric co-op



Just make the call before digging:

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Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging

for foundations, trees and tiling. Register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☎️



Marcia Solie,
Member
Services Manager

Staff Notes

Save more with federal tax credits, incentives and rebates for efficiency upgrades

Members often call the office to find out about programs to help with the purchase of energy efficiency upgrades. Tax credits and rebates can help bridge the affordability gap to higher efficiency equipment for your home, allowing you to complete energy-efficiency upgrades that can lower your energy use and save you money in years to come.

Knowing the difference between a tax credit and rebate is important. A rebate is a payment for purchasing or installing a qualified product or home improvement. Brown County REA offers rebates on geothermal and air source heat pumps, Energy Star certified refrigerators and freezers with recycling of an old unit, clothes dryers and dehumidifiers. Rebates under \$100 are paid as a bill credit. Higher amounts are paid by check and require detailed paperwork and often connection to load control to qualify for the highest amounts.

While some items, like air conditioners, windows and insulation aren't eligible for Brown County REA rebates, they may qualify for tax credits. A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar amount that taxpayers can report on their tax documents to reduce the amount of taxes owed. You apply for a tax credit when you file your tax documents; it typically takes longer for these benefits than a rebate.

According to ENERGY STAR®, homeowners can qualify for up to \$3,200 annually in federal tax credits for energy-efficiency upgrades. Federal tax credits are available for heating and cooling system upgrades, including heat pumps, furnaces, central air conditioners, boilers and geothermal heat pumps. Tax credits for ENERGY STAR®-rated heat pump water heaters cover 30 percent of the project cost, up to \$2,000. You can also improve your home's envelope — the portion of the home that separates the inside from the outside — with tax credits for insulation, windows and skylights.

If an energy-efficiency upgrade requires improving the electrical panel in your home, there's a tax credit for that, too. You can receive 30 percent of the cost of the panel upgrade, up to \$600.

These federal tax credits are available through 2032. You must own the home you're upgrading, and it must be your primary residence. Federal tax credits only apply to existing homes in the United States, not new construction.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 expanded available funding for many home upgrades. The act allocated \$8.8 million for home rebate programs to be implemented at the state level; this funding is offered in two different programs. The HOMES program allows up to \$8,000 per home for standard-income households. Higher rebates are available for low- to moderate-income households. The HEAR program offers rebates of up to \$14,000 per home for qualified, efficient electric equipment for low- to moderate-income households. These programs are designed to bolster existing programs and should be available in late 2024 or early 2025 and many of the details are still unknown.

Tax credit and rebate programs can make upgrades more affordable — helping people save money and improve the overall comfort of their homes. (E)



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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors
Thomas Hayes, President — 507-228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 507-766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 507-829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 507-317-5576
David Wendinger — 507-276-3166
Greg Mages — 507-794-3540
Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550
James Mickelson — 507-794-6298
Landon Sletta — 507-439-6559
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on July 18, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the June 2024 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved June 2024 payroll and June financial statement.
- Updated on progress with the merging of former Alliant Energy rates and upcoming rate changes.
- Reviewed recent Power Cost Adjustment (PCA), which is being monitored monthly.
- Discussed plans for upcoming Coffee with the Co-op events.
- Updated on operations' activities, including overhead maintenance, service rebuilds and progress on Hillcrest Lane and County Road 13 projects.
- Voted to approve the withdrawal of Crow Wing Cooperative Power and Light Company as a member of Great River Energy.

The next meeting is set for August 28, 2024, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. (E)