

Connections

September 2019

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 23, Issue 9

Your electric cooperative works hard to make sure electricity is a bargain

According to 2017 statistics, the average monthly electric bill in Minnesota was \$100. That comes out to about \$3.30 a day.

Think about what that \$3.30 a day buys: heat in the winter, air conditioning in the summer, refrigeration for your food, lights for your home, conveniences like garage door openers, hot water and clean clothes, cooked food, charged phones and even entertainment like TV, video games and computers.

Electricity is truly a bargain when compared to other items. For example, what can \$1 of electricity operate for you?

- Refrigerator: one week
- Ceiling fan: 30 days
- Lamp: six months
- Cell phone: 1.5 years
- Air conditioner: 24 hours
- 40-inch TV: one month

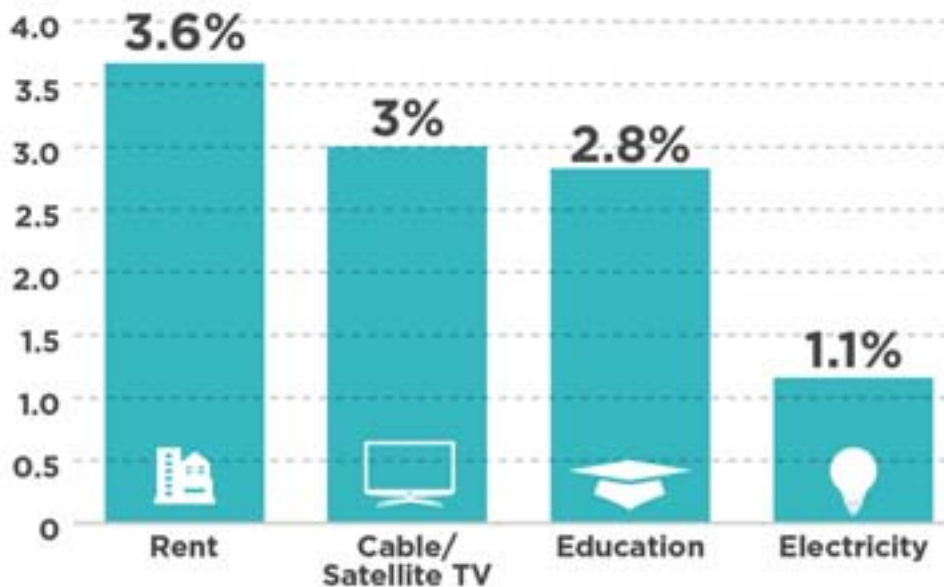
What makes it possible? Factors include: responsible electric cooperative leadership, competitive forms of electricity (coal, wind, solar, hydro and more) and electric cooperative employees working to bring you reliable, economical power.

Electricity continues to be a bargain, especially when compared to other consumer goods and how things have risen in price over the years. So the next time you flip a switch, use your toaster or run your

washing machine, remember the value electricity holds. Plus, know that your electric cooperative is looking out for you by working together to keep electric bills affordable, controlling costs through innovation and putting you, our members, first. Ⓢ

Electricity remains a good value for co-op members

PERCENT



The cost of powering your home rises slowly when compared to other common expenses over the past five years. In comparison is easy to see that electricity remains a good value!

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Are you upgrading your farm, home or business?

If you are trying to upgrade your bin sites before fall, make sure you call Brown County Rural Electrical Association as soon as possible. We need to know the details of your project to make sure we can complete our part in the process before the winter season puts a halt on construction projects. Ⓢ



Co-op offers a 'Try it before you buy it' program for electric forklifts

Your electric cooperative now offers its members a way to "try before they buy" short-term lease option with electric forklifts. These members who are interested in the technology can see how it works for their farm or business.

Electric forklifts have a much smaller environmental impact than propane or diesel models. Plus, an overall lower total cost of ownership exists — an average of 30 percent less — when maintenance and support infrastructure considerations are taken into account. Companies that adopt all-electric forklift fleets are reducing ventilation and monitoring costs by removing the combustion sources. Employees are safer too; they no longer must handle propane cylinders and experience a much quieter work environment.

For example, what happens if an internal-combustion forklift's transmission fails? The engine works harder, causing more wear and tear, plus fuel costs. Combustion engines also require spark plugs, filters, oil and more, which need regular replacement. On the other hand, electric forklifts have a battery and drive motor. No coolant, belts or other maintenance-intensive items are present. The annual maintenance costs for an electric forklift are estimated to be approximately one-third of what it costs to maintain a similar internal combustion forklift.

Generally speaking, the operating costs for an electric forklift can be 85-95 percent less than a diesel or LP



Electric forklifts can be a cost-effective option for members looking to replace their older internal-combustion units. The "try it before you buy it" program offers members a chance to test an electric forklift.

forklift. While an LP forklift might cost several thousand dollars per year to operate, a comparable electric forklift could cost less than a thousand.


Presently, about 90 percent of forklifts use an eight gallon tank of liquid propane. If a propane forklift has a four-cylinder engine, the tank should last about eight hours.

Let's say propane is \$2.40 a gallon. That means it cost \$19.20 to operate that propane forklift for eight hours.

Meanwhile, charging costs vary for electric forklifts based on use and cost of electricity. The Electric Power Research Institute provides a good

resource for comparing costs and customizing inputs. Visit <https://et.epri.com>. Search for "fork lift calculator."

Contact your electric co-op's energy expert for more information on the "try before you buy" program for electric forklifts.

Forklift dealers Great River Energy has worked with include Herc-U-Lift, Sioux Falls, (1-800-658-3644) and Toyota Lift, Brooklyn Park, (1-800-523-0611). Both dealers are flexible with short-term lease options to fit the program and also offer flexible longer-term lease or purchase options to work within capital budgets. 

An electric car for a weekend road trip

Let's say you are a nine-to-five commuter, but would prefer a car that can take you even farther on one charge. Enter the 2019 Chevy Bolt; it boasts an all-electric range of 238 miles and a price tag of \$29,995 after the full federal tax credit is applied.

You could get through a regular work week with only plugging in your EV once and could drive straight from the office to dinner one night and the kids' game another without worrying about whether you drain the battery.

If you do find yourself needing to get a quick charge while you're away from home, more than 200 public charging stations are available throughout Minnesota at locations, such as workplaces, restaurants and



The Chevy Bolt gives road trippers approximately 230 miles on a charge.

retail stores. You can add about 90 miles to your Bolt when plugged into a DC fast charger station, which are designed to charge EVs quickly and

can be found in spots from Mankato to the metro and all the way up to Hinckley. Just download a charging app on your smartphone. ☎

Safety

Stay alert around power lines this harvest season

Bigger and better equipment makes some things about harvest easier, but it can also increase the possibility of hitting power lines and the green padmount transformers.

Larger equipment makes it quicker to work through a field, but large equipment requires extra care when working end rows that border power lines. Be careful and slow down when working around electrical equipment to make sure impacts do not happen. Causing an outage can impact more than just you. It can cause outages for other farmers. It also requires linemen to leave construction work they need to finish before winter to fix the issue. Finally, hitting an electric pole will cost you. The responsible party must pay the cost to fix the issue. Plus, you risk electrocution.

GPS-guided equipment also makes farming easier. Drivers can have their hands off the steering wheel, as the machines maneuver their way around the fields. As smart as GPS is, it may not be smart enough to avoid electric equipment. Stay alert at all times when power lines are in the picture.

Other safety guidelines include:

- Use a spotter when operating large machinery near power lines.
- Keep equipment at least 10 feet from power lines in all directions.
- Look up when moving augers or raising grain trucks



Satellites can look down and help guide farm equipment through fields with GPS, but they may not help you avoid power lines. Stay alert!

around power lines. Inspect the height of farm equipment to determine clearance. Always set extensions to the lowest setting when moving loads to prevent contact with overhead power lines. Grain augers should always be positioned horizontally before being moved.

- Never attempt to move a power line out of the way or raise it for clearance.
- If a power line is sagging, contact your electric co-op.
- If your equipment does make contact with a power line, do not exit. Call 911 and warn others to stay away until linemen cut the power. Only exit if vehicle is on fire. In that case jump off the equipment with your feet together without touching the ground and machinery at the same time. Keep your feet together and hop to safety. ☎

Brown County Briefs

Member Advisory Council date changed to September 23

Due to a scheduling conflict, the next meeting of the Member Advisory Council has changed to September 23, beginning with a light meal at 6 p.m. at the Brown County REA headquarters. The meeting begins at 6:30.

Adding electrical load this fall?



Are you planning to install, modify or replace electric equipment this fall at your home, business or farm? If so, please contact BCREA with project details as soon as possible. By contacting us we can ensure:

- Our equipment is sufficiently 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 is efficiently scheduled to eliminate delays.
- Project costs are kept to a minimum.

By working together we can help your project go smoothly. If you have questions, please call 794-3331 or 800-658-2368. ☎

Members' small change benefits many



Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board Member Arlene Helget (left) presented a \$550 check to Comfrey Community Health Care Building Board Member Marianne Schotzko. The funds, made possible through Brown County REA members who "round up" their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month, will be used toward the purchase of a power lift reclining chair at Brickstone Manor.

The Operation Round Up Trust Board distributed \$1,850 to seven organizations in the BCREA service area at its meeting August 20.

Funds were awarded to Southern Minnesota Youth Dairy Show, Brown County Free Fair, New Ulm Chamber of Commerce Internship Program, Minnesota Brain Injury Force, Sleepy Eye Safety Day, Sleepy Eye Senior Living and Comfrey Community Healthcare Building, Inc.

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 \$85.48, you pay \$86. The 52-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. 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 Arlene Helget, Vickie Kral, Scott Chambard, Kari Berg, Lynnae Pelzel, Lee Johnson, Michelle Strate, Ann Wendinger or Michelle Oswald. Applications are also available on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop, under the Programs & Services tab, or by contacting the office at 800-658-2368 or 794-3331. ☎

I want to be a part of Operation Round Up

Name: _____

Address: _____

Return with your electric bill or mail to *Brown County Rural Electric*
24386 State Hwy 4, Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085.



Prepare now to stay cozy this winter

As temperatures start to drop outside, it's a good time to make sure your heating system is ready to keep your home toasty warm inside during the months ahead.

If you have a heat pump or electric heat and participate in BCREA's dual fuel or off-peak heat program, make sure your back-up systems are operating correctly. When your electric heat is controlled you will need to have an automatic, non-electric or storage back-up heat source to keep your home comfortable until the electric heat is restored.

Take time now to perform routine maintenance and make sure you have plenty of fuel for your back-up heat source.

- Make sure your system is sized to keep your entire home comfortable



If you need to look under the hood of your heating system to prepare for the upcoming winter, now is the time to get it checked out — before you need it!

during control periods, which typically last four to six hours.

- Tune up your heating source to make sure it will be available when you need it.
- Check your LP or fuel oil supply now. Fill up while prices are lower.
- Regularly clean or replace your furnace filters.
- Test the system to make sure the back-up source starts automatically when electric heat is controlled.

Remember, electric heat is controlled during periods of high demand (coldest winter evenings) and when market prices are high, but other factors can lead to load control. Check the daily load control schedule by clicking on the graphic of the load control receiver on our website www.browncountyrea.coop. (a)

Tips for using BCREA secure phone payment line

For several months now Brown County REA has been taking members' credit/debit card payments using a secure, automated payment line through Payment Service Network (PSN). Members still call the office toll free at 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331 and are transferred to the payment line. Some people have had issues or said the process takes too long. Here are a few tips for using the interactive voice response (IVR) system:

- Listen carefully to the prompts.
- Know your REA account number and the amount due.
- Account is set up with the primary account holder's name and phone number. If different, you may register the number you are calling from and can have multiple phone numbers associated with an account.
- Information added to your account will be saved for future use.



- If the payment amount is \$75, enter "7500." You do not enter a decimal point.
- After each entry press # to expedite the process.
- Press 0 at any time to get payment line Customer Service Representative help. (a)

 Like us on Facebook!

Also, visit our website (www.browncountyrea.coop) to learn more about our money-saving programs and rebates!

 **The Power to Protect**

Your home, your business, your loved ones. Rely on Heartland Security to safeguard whatever matters most to you.

Heartland Security can help you protect your home, farm or business with a variety of options: alarms, surveillance cameras, smartphone controls and more are available. Call Heartland Security at 888-264-6380 to learn more about the many applications of our systems. (a)

Cold weather rule outlines process to avoid winter disconnection and loss of electricity

The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule guides utilities on winter disconnections, as long as customers follow these three main guidelines.

Residential customer notice

An electric cooperative must not disconnect and must reconnect the utility service of a home between October 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. The household income of the customer is at or below 50 percent of the state median household income. The electric cooperative may verify income on forms it provides or obtain verification of income from the local energy-assistance provider. A customer meets the income requirements of this clause if the customer receives any public assistance, including energy assistance that uses an income eligibility threshold set at or below 50 percent of the state median household income;

2. A customer enters into and makes reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household; and

3. A customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills. In addition, an electric cooperative must, between August 15 and October 15 of each year, notify all residential customers of these provisions.

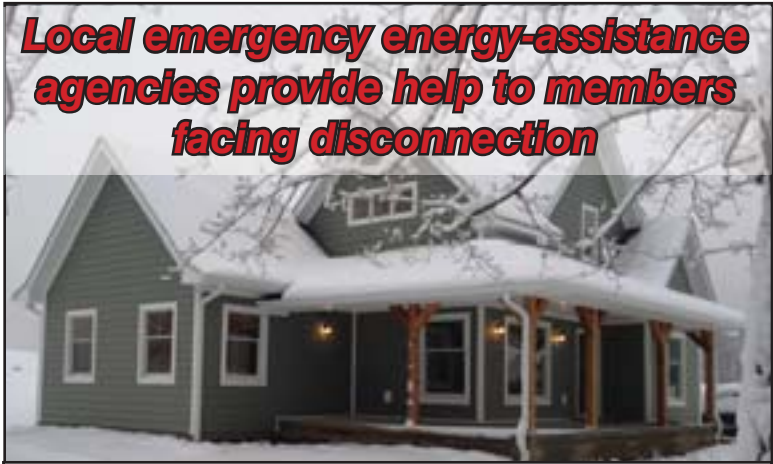
Before disconnecting service to a residential customer between October 15 and April 15, an electric cooperative must provide:

1. A notice of the proposed disconnection;
2. A statement with the customer's rights and responsibilities;
3. A list of local energy-assistance providers;
4. Forms on which to declare an inability to pay; and
5. A statement explaining available time-payment plans and other options to secure continued utility service.

Restrictions for disconnection

1. If a customer must be involuntarily disconnected between October 15 and April 15 for failure to comply with residential disconnection provisions, it must not occur on a Friday, unless the customer declines to enter into a payment agreement offered that day in person or via personal contact by telephone by the electric cooperative;

2. The disconnection must not occur on a weekend, holiday or the day before a holiday, when utility offices are closed, or after the close of business on a day when disconnection is permitted, unless a field representative from the electric cooperative who is authorized to enter



Local emergency energy-assistance agencies provide help to members facing disconnection

If you live in an area that is not listed, call your electric co-op for details

Blue Earth County	507-345-6822
Des Moines Valley Human Services (Jackson & Cottonwood)	847-4000
Martin County Human Services.....	238-4757
MN Dept. of Energy Svcs (Ask for fuel assistance)	1-800-657-3805
Minnesota Valley Action Council.....	1-800-767-7139
Brown County.....	354-3138
Martin County.....	238-1663
Nicollet County.....	934-5224
Sibley County	237-2981
Watonwan County	375-5748
Nobles County Family Services Agency	372-2157
Renville County Family Services	320-523-5522
Salvation Army's Heat Share (Jackson, Martin & Brown Co.)	1-800-842-7279
Sibley County Human Services	237-4000
SW Health & Human Services (Redwood Co.)	1-888-234-1292
SW MN Opportunity Council, Inc. (Nobles Co.)	376-4195
United Community Action Partnership (Jackson, Cottonwood & Redwood Counties) ...	1-800-658-2448
Watonwan County Human Services	375-3294

into a payment agreement, accept payment and continue service offers a payment agreement to the customer; and

3. If a customer does not respond to a disconnection notice, the customer must not be disconnected until the utility investigates whether the home is occupied. If the unit is occupied, the utility must immediately inform the occupant of the provisions of this section. If the unit is unoccupied, the utility must give seven days written notice of the proposed disconnection to the local energy-assistance provider before disconnecting. If, prior to disconnection, a customer appeals a notice of involuntary disconnection, as provided by the utility's established appeal procedure, the utility must not disconnect until the appeal is resolved. (C)

An apple recipe a day keeps doctor & hunger pains away

Apples are ripening on the trees. Do you have a great apple recipe to make our day? They can be for apple pie, crisp, cobbler, caramel, fruit salad, bars and more. Share with us your apple recipes; send 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! ☺

We'll provide the hot water for your next soak



Turn to your electric cooperative for your next water heater. We'll provide the hot water for your family's bath, shower and even hand washing! Our water heaters have a limited lifetime warranty against leaks for the original owner, along with insulation to retain your "hot" water. ☺

Members 'got a charge' out of Farmfest booth



Thanks cooperative members for visiting the Touchstone Energy booth at Farmfest August 6-8. Members played Plinko to win small prizes. In addition, three rechargeable yard tools were grand prizes (electric mower, electric blower and trimmer). Brown County REA's Marcia Solie and Federated's Andrea Christoffer worked the booth August 6. In addition, three electric cars were on display August 7 in the morning at the south gate entrance. ☺

Active military personnel: 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. ☺



Call Gopher State One 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.gopherstate-onecall.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

James Mickelson, President — 794-6298
William Berg, Vice President — 354-4895
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 877-2633
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
Thomas Hayes — 228-8954
Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



Brandon Havemeier
Operations Manager

Staff notes

Power line safety down on the farm

Harvest season is right around the corner as tractors, augers and combines come out of the shed and get ready to do their work. We, at Brown County REA, want to remind farmers and farm workers to look up and look out for power lines.

While we know it is a busy time and you are focused on getting the crop out, we want you to be aware of your surroundings and remember to look up. Those power lines are energized and bringing electricity to your farm, family and business.

If you do come in contact with a power line:

- Call 911 as soon as possible and keep the area clear until help arrives.
- If you can do so without risking your machinery or damaging utility infrastructure, drive at least 40 feet away.
- If the vehicle is on fire or you must exit for other safety reasons, jump clear so that no part of your body touches the equipment and ground at the same time and land with feet together. Hop to safety with both feet together to avoid electric shock.

Other tips for operating farm equipment around power lines include:

- Physical contact with a power line is extremely hazardous and may cause a lethal shock. Equipment should not be operated under a power line in a manner that would cause contact or near-contact with the wires.
- Do not lift, elevate, build or pass under a power line any object, tool or vehicle that may make contact or near-contact with the wires.
- To help prevent arc flashing, it is recommended that equipment, antennas and people stay at least 15 feet away from any energized power line wire.
- Equipment that can be extended, such as a stack mower or grain elevator, requires the utmost care when near a power line.

We wish everyone a safe fall! ☺

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting August 29 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Approved the July 2019 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, assignment transfers and payments to estates.
 - Reviewed progress with summer construction, including Highway 257 and Highway 15 project and underground rebuilds. Informed that replacement of rejected poles is complete.
 - Discussed plans for the September 23 Member Advisory Council meeting.
 - Updated on the progress of issuing refunds of \$5 membership fees to 176 inactive memberships. Checks will be sent to the last known address of the inactive member.
 - Reviewed and approved Policy 210 Economic and Community Development. Policy 211 Line Extensions was reviewed and tabled for further discussion.
 - Reviewed recent employee training and safety meetings.
- The next meeting will be September 26 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺



Thank you to all who stopped by the Touchstone Energy booth at Farmfest. Winners of the prize drawings were Harold Kelm, Meeker Cooperative — electric trimmer; Benedict Grosam, Renville-Sibley Cooperative — leaf blower; Allen Zollner, Redwood Electric Cooperative — electric lawn mower. ☺