

Connections

September 2021

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 25, Issue 9

Make it a safe harvest this fall when using farm machinery! Harvest crops & not your co-op's utility poles or equipment

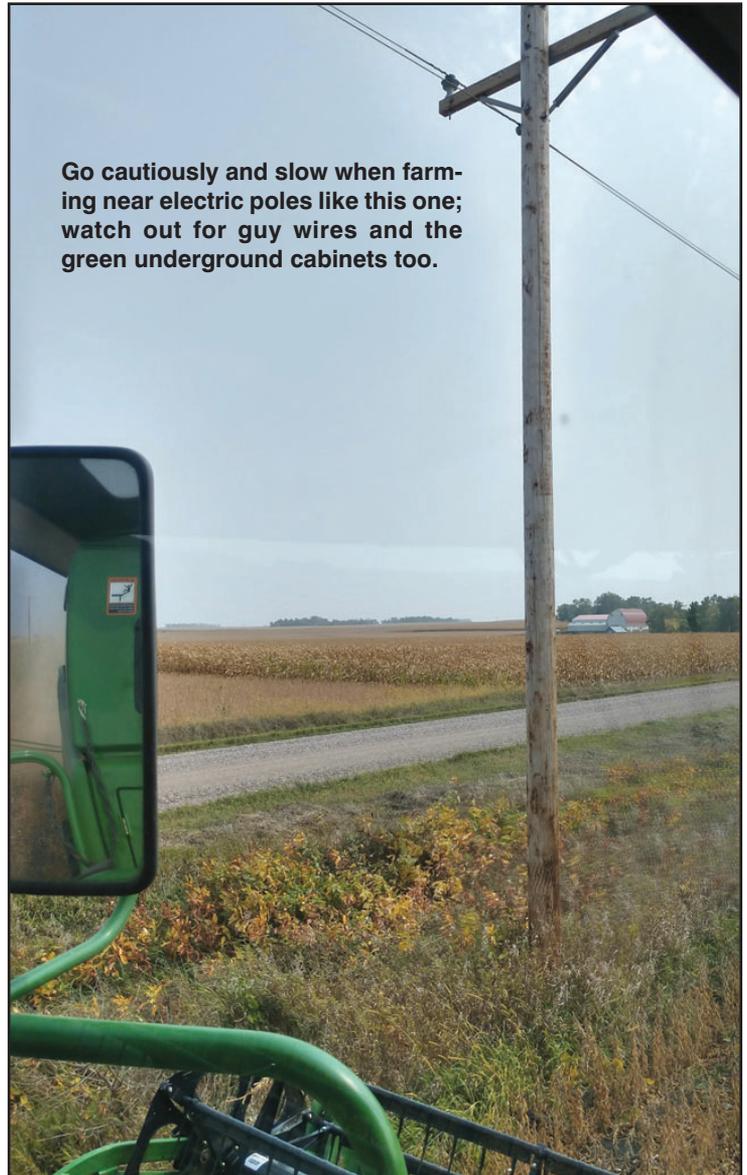
Agriculture is the backbone of our country. Our livelihood greatly depends on the crops provided by American farmers. In addition to being one of the most labor-intensive professions, farming is also considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the U.S.

The hard work and exhaustive hours are tough, but rushing the job to save time can be extremely dangerous — even deadly — when farming near electrical equipment.

Every year your electric cooperative see collisions where tractors and other farming equipment accidentally collide with utility poles and power lines, causing power outages and sometimes injuries. These dangerous accidents can be avoided by looking up and around your surroundings when operating large farm machinery. If you're preparing for harvest season, please keep the following safety tips in mind.

- Maintain a 10-foot clearance in all directions around all utility equipment.
- Use a spotter and deploy flags to maintain safe distances from power lines and other electrical equipment when working in the field.
- If your equipment makes contact with an energized or downed power line, contact 9-1-1 immediately and remain inside the vehicle until the power line is de-energized. In case of smoke or fire exit the cab by making a solid jump out of the cab (without touching it) and hop away to safety.
- Consider equipment and cargo extensions of your vehicle. Lumber, augers, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipes and even bulk materials can conduct electricity; keep these out of contact with electrical equipment.

September 19-25 is National Farm Health and Safety Week. Yet, practicing farm safety all year yields positive results. We hope you never find yourself in a situation where farming equipment contacts utility poles, but if you do, we hope you'll remember these safety tips. Ⓢ



Go cautiously and slow when farming near electric poles like this one; watch out for guy wires and the green underground cabinets too.

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Members' small change adds up

Participating in BCREA's Operation Round Up program is a great way to help out your community. Learn how Operation Round Up's most recent round of funding made a difference on Page 4. Ⓢ

Three countertop kitchen appliances to save time, money and energy too

It's no secret that ovens consume more energy than countertop appliances, like slow cookers and toaster ovens. In addition to energy-efficiency smaller kitchen appliances can provide faster cooking times and less hassle with cleanup.

Ovens typically use 1,000 to 5,000 watts, with an average modern oven using around 2,400 watts on medium to high heat. That means it costs about 25 cents an hour to operate.

If you're looking for convenient cooking methods with the added bonus of energy efficiency, explore these three options.

Air fryers healthier too

Air fryers are becoming increasingly popular. Air fryers use convection to circulate hot air and cook the food. This means little to no oil is required, resulting in healthier meals than those from traditional fryers. Air fryers are fairly small, so they won't take up much of your counter space. With everything cooked in the fryer, cleanup is also a breeze. Air fryers are available in a variety of sizes. Prices range from \$40 to \$200. An average air fryer uses 1400 watt. That costs about 14 cents an hour.

Electric griddles so convenient

Electric griddles offer several benefits for any home chef (beyond bacon and eggs). Griddles are convenient because you can cook everything at once like a "one-pan" meal. From fajitas to sandwiches and French toast griddles can help satisfy any taste buds. They consume small amounts



Air fryers (bottom right) circulate hot air (convection) to cook the food. Little to no oil is required, resulting in healthier meals than those from traditional fryers. Electric griddles (top) consume small amounts of energy and provide quick cooking times, so your energy bill will thank you. Pizza makers are compact and inexpensive; it uses less energy than your traditional oven.

of energy and provide quick cooking times. Prices and sizes for griddles vary, but you can typically find one for about \$30 at your local retail stores. An average electric griddle uses 1500 watts. That costs about 16 cents/hour.

Pizza makers deliver faster food

Pizza brings people together, so why not consider a pizza maker for your kitchen? These compact countertop machines are an inexpensive alternative to a costly brick oven. Plus, they use less energy than your

traditional oven. Choose your own fresh ingredients to whip up a faster, healthier pizza at home. Plus, most pizza makers are multifunctional and can be used to cook flatbreads, frittatas, quesadillas and more. You can purchase a pizza maker for about \$30 to \$150. An average pizza maker uses 1,440 watts. That costs about 15 cents an hour.

Remember, when you're cooking a smaller meal, countertop appliances can save time and energy.

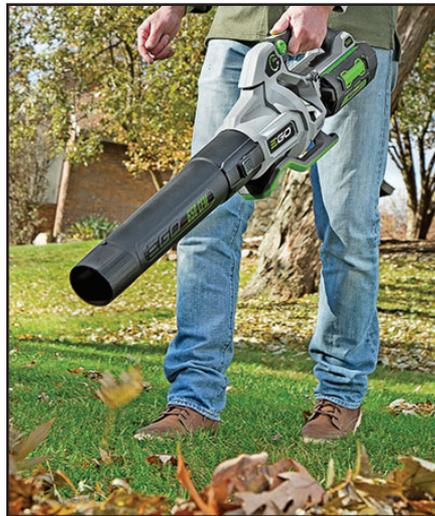
Electric leaf blowers convenient and clean

When you need to make quick work of leaves and debris, the benefits of an electric leaf blower become immediately clear. Choosing a battery-powered tool means you've opted for convenience, low maintenance, cleaner air, an easier start and quieter operation.

When picking which electric leaf blower to go for, focus on power and battery operation.

- Power refers to the cubic feet per minute (CFM) and the miles per hour (MPH) of the air that's being pushed through the nozzle. You want that number to be high if you're looking for a serious blower. Yard blowers that feature both the ability to move debris (MPH) and keep it moving (CFM) are the ones that will perform the job and be comfortable to operate.

- Battery operation: the best battery-powered leaf blowers all use rechargeable batteries. Two numbers listed in the product descriptions — ampere



Ego electric leaf blowers offer power, longevity and ease of use. Just plug them in and go to work. It charges in about 45 minutes and can run for 90 minutes. Use it to blow chaff off a combine or air dry after a car wash too. hours (Ah) and voltage — help you know its capabilities under ideal conditions.

The Ah is the amount of amperage/current that the battery can deliver (based on one hour). A higher number means a higher energy charge, which is a good thing.

Voltage can be described as the power that pushes the current through the battery. Again, the higher the better. The two measurements working together help you find the watt battery capacity. Think of watts as a battery's fuel tank size indicator. The larger the fuel tank, the higher the energy capacity the battery will have.

Electric leaf blowers are lighter, use less energy, create no emissions and operate far quieter than gas-powered options. Avoid filling a gas can and tugging a cord to start. Electric blowers start with the push of a button.

One good model that is a balance of all of these qualities is the Ego Electric Leaf Blower. It is available in hardware stores for approximately \$300, as it comes in a variety of sizes. 

Safety

Never attach TV dish, sign on co-op pole

Electric cooperatives across the state run into interesting safety issues. Some of these stories have good lessons that should be shared so no one else finds themselves in a similar predicament. Some stories are also hard to believe that they are true. Here are two examples.

Story #1 : an electric cooperative crew found a TV dish installed within 11 inches of the energized pole's fuse, line and transformer. The crew removed the dish and talked to the consumer about the dangers of installing the dish on the pole. No items should be attached on electric pole by a consumer. Poles can be dangerous spaces when you are not wearing proper personal protective equipment and have no experience



Never install a TV dish on an electric pole!

in line work. A leftover nail from a sign can be dangerous to line crews too.

Story #2: one weekend a member was shooting down into a hole with a shotgun, not knowing that the hole contained a three-phase underground cable; the member shot holes in the energized three-phase cable,

causing a 90-minute outage for 61 members. The member realized something wasn't right due to the sound of the faulting cable and found out about the outage soon after. When the cable was repaired, an electric cooperative crew discovered animals had also been chewing on the cable and did significant damage that would likely result in an outage at a later date. All three phases were damaged and needed to be repaired.

These people were lucky and didn't get electrocuted; yet, luck doesn't keep you safe. Know the power of electricity and that it is only safe when we respect it. If you have any questions when it comes to electrical safety, call your electric cooperative to learn more. 

Brown County Briefs

New office hours

The office is now open for business Monday-Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Phone calls are answered 24/7/365. Stay current with what is happening at your electric co-op by visiting our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/Brown-County-REA.

“Water” you waiting for?

Now may be a good time to replace that 20-year-old water heater before it springs a leak. Turn to BCREA for your next American-made, insulated electric water heater. Member cost is \$500 for any size placed on the peak shave program; otherwise, it's \$250 for 80 or 100-gallon placed on the storage program where the water heater is controlled Monday-Friday 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Call the office to learn more. 

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Energy used for cooling and heating your home makes up the largest portion of your monthly energy bills. By combining regular equipment maintenance and upgrades with recommended insulation, air sealing and thermostat settings, you can save about 30% on your energy bills while helping our environment.

Source: energy.gov



Members' small change has big benefits for many through Operation Round Up



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board distributed \$2,100 to three organizations and three individuals/families in the BCREA service area at its August 17 meeting.

Funds were awarded to Southern Minnesota Youth Dairy Show, Brown County Free Fair and SWWC Foundation for Innovation in Education.

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 is 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 16. Organizations interested in applying for funding through the Round Up Trust can request an application from trust board members Pat Roiger, Vickie Kral, Kim Hensch, Kari Helget, Lynnae Pelzel, Lee Johnson, Lisa Schmitz, Jessie Beranek 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. 

Prepare now and you'll stay cozy all winter long



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 the 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 during control periods.
- Tune up your heating source to make sure it will be available when you need it.
- Check your LP or fuel oil supply now, and 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 control. Check the daily load control schedule by clicking on the graphic of the load control receiver on our website's home page www.browncountyrea.coop. 

Beware: don't fall victim to utility scams

Every day millions of Americans are targeted by scammers through phone calls, emails, text messages, online or in person. Scammers' tactics can change daily, which is why it's important for consumers to stay on top of the latest scam reports from local and national news outlets, as well as your local utility companies.

Brown County REA recently received a report from a member who was targeted through a phone scam where the scammers demanded immediate payment and threatened to shut off power if the money was not received. Remember, BCREA will never call you and demand immediate payment without notice.

Here are a few reminders to take control of the situation when you've been targeted by a scammer:

- Take your time. Utility scammers try to create a sense of urgency so that you'll act fast and hand over personal information, especially over the phone. Take a moment to



think about the situation before acting. Plus, never provide or confirm personal or financial information to anyone initiating contact with you and claiming to be a utility employee.

- Be suspicious. Scammers typically request immediate payments through prepaid debit cards or third-party apps. Unusual requests should raise red flags. Remember, if the request seems strange and out of the ordinary, you're likely being targeted by a scammer.

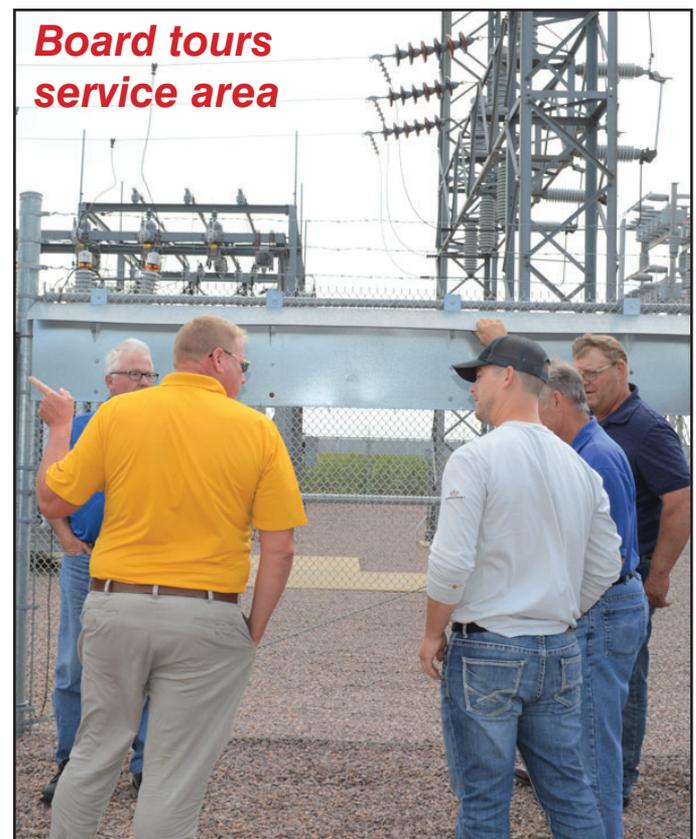
- Confirm before you act. If you're contacted by someone claiming to represent Brown County REA or another utility but you're unsure, just hang up the phone. Then call BCREA at 800-658-2368 to report the scam.

Our increasingly connected world provides scammers with more opportunities to connect with unsuspecting consumers. Be vigilant; please report any utility scams to BCREA so we can let others in our area know. Together, we can help prevent our neighbors from being victimized. ☎

Thank you for donating back-to-school supplies to area students



Brown County REA hosted a collection box for the United Way of Brown County Area's school supply drive. Through the 50 collection boxes in Brown County, donations of 7,500 pencils, 600 colored pencil sets, 670 crayon sets, 1,100 glue sticks, 450 spiral notebooks and more were donated to fill 350 backpacks. BCREA's Cynthia Hanson and United Way representative Gwyn Goettig Ruddy are shown with items. ☎



Following its August meeting, the Brown County REA Board and management team toured the southern portion of the service territory. They visited and viewed substations and recent infrastructure project sites. The co-op thanks Thielen Bus Lines of Redwood Falls for the use of a small bus. ☎

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 statements 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 Oct. 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 60 percent of the state median income to qualify for benefits. Applications must be received or



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	508-4041
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	320-523-1842
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

postmarked by May 31, 2022.

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 and to access the application portal.
- 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. ☎️

2021 Minnesota Income Eligibility

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	ANNUAL INCOME LIMIT
1 person	\$33,918
2 persons	\$44,355
3 persons	\$54,791
4 persons	\$65,228
5 persons	\$75,664
6 persons	\$86,101

Just pepper us with recipes using red, green & jalepeno peppers!

Did Peter Piper pick a peck of peppers from your patch? Share with us your recipes using garden peppers, such as red, green, banana and jalepeno peppers. Mail to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by September 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Crock Pot Tater Tot Hot Dish by Roxanne Andersen, Hanska

Approximately two-pound bag of tater tots 2 cans cream-style corn
2 lbs. hamburger ½ c. milk
2 cans cream of chicken soup

Layer as follows in 6 QT crock pot sprayed well with cooking oil: layer of tater tots pressed firmly on the bottom. 1 pound of hamburger fried and drained. 1 can cream of chicken soup. 1 can of cream style corn. Next layer: repeat the first layer. Lastly put a layer of tater tots and then pour milk on top. Cook on high for four hours or low for eight hours (note: this depends on your crock pot temps etc.). Serve with favorite toast or bread sticks. ☺

Call your
co-op for
your next
American-
made water
heater



Farmfest electric, battery-charged yard tools a hit; congrats to the prize winners

Five Ego electric yard tools were the prizes at the Touchstone Energy electric cooperative booth at Farmfest August 3-5.

Thanks to all of the electric cooperative members who stopped by to visit and register. The winners were:

- Lowell Mathistad, Butterfield, string trimmer
- Howard Johnson, Willmar, leaf blower
- Neal Johnson, Hector, snowblower
- Richard Kuechle, Watkins, chain-saw
- Normal Skarphol, Madelia, lawn mower.

12 central and southern Minnesota electric cooperatives jointly sponsor this Touchstone Energy booth. ☺



Electric co-op members stopped by the Touchstone Energy booth at Farmfest.

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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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 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
David Wendinger — 276-3166
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
James Mickelson — 794-6298
Landon Sletta — 439-6559
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



**Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer**

Staff Notes

Power Cost Adjustment relief for all

The summer of 2021 will likely be remembered as a hot, dry season and when it comes to your electric bill, weather matters.

High temperatures drive up summer electric bills as people spend more time indoors running the air conditioners or heat pumps and using appliances and electronics more. Even though it may be cooler by the time you open your next REA statement, remember, your bill reflects the

previous month's usage which was impacted by several days of high heat and humidity.

While you will still be billed for the kilowatt-hours (kWh) used, the BCREA Board of Directors took action at its August meeting to offer some relief to members with a Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) reduction.

To help with the high PCA in August, the Board chose to use \$100,000 of the cooperative's margins to reduce the PCA to members. The Board and management determined margins were available in 2021 to take this step to help our members. The PCA for August usage would have been 2 cents per kilowatt hour. With the applied credit that charge is less than a penny per kWh.

The PCA reflects monthly fluctuations in the cost of fuel and set purchased wholesale power rates. When the costs are below the estimates, members receive a PCA credit on the monthly bill. If the costs are higher, as they have been during the unusually warm summer months, the PCA is an added charge.

As mentioned last month, wholesale power cost is Brown County REA's largest expense and the PCA is a pass-through from the wholesale power bill to the members' bills. But this month, we are glad to be able to offers our members a little savings with the reduced PCA.

Cooler days are ahead. We wish you all a safe fall and harvest! ☺

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly meeting on August 26, 2021, in the REA headquarters auditorium.

Discussion and/or action was taken on the following agenda items:

- Updated about July and August load control activities.
 - Informed of recent additions of Distributed Energy Resources by members.
 - Discussed and approved using \$100,000 of BCREA margins to apply to the membership in the form of reduced Power Cost Adjustment on August electric bills.
 - Informed of Rural Electric Supply Company (RESCO) capital credit allocation for 2020 and retirement of outstanding 2010 capital credits.
 - Reviewed and approved extension of a line of credit for Heartland Security Services, LLC, a Brown County REA subsidiary, from National Cooperative Services Corporation.
 - Updated on construction activities, including Cobden/Sleepy Eye three-phase work plan project and rejected pole change-outs and transfer of liability.
- The next meeting is set for September 30, 2021, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺



Freezer full? Need more space?

Buy an Energy Star refrigerator or freezer and receive a \$75 BCREA rebate; must have proof of recycling the old unit. Find the form on our website or call to request it.