

# Connections

August 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 8

## Wonderful Washington, D.C. wows local students on 2024 Youth Tour

So what did you do this summer? Two students, sponsored by their local electric cooperative, highlight their Washington, D.C. adventure won by participating in the Youth Tour Contest.

Brown County REA sponsored Cindy Jensen, Comfrey. She is the daughter of David and Kelli. Meanwhile, Federated Rural Electric sponsored Elsa Thompson, Elmore. She is the daughter of Malorie and Todd.

### Cindy Jensen's trip highlights

"My favorite memorial was the Lincoln Memorial," Jensen stated. "I liked that it had all of the 50 state's names on the outside. I also liked the architecture; it was just beautiful.

"I also really liked the Washington Monument because I've always wanted to see it in person. It stuck out to me during our night tour; it looked really pretty all lit up and with the sunset."

Museums were also fascinating. "I really enjoyed all the Smithsonian's sculptures, including bones, replicas and outdoor sculptures," Jensen said. "We visited the Holocaust Museum and the FDR Roosevelt Memorial/museum. I learned that he was paralyzed at the end of his presidency. I thought Mount Vernon was really cool too. I learned a lot about George Washington."

Jensen liked other sites as well. "I really enjoyed the tour of the second



largest Cathedral in the U.S. — the National Cathedral. We explored Old Town Alexandria on the last day so it gave us time to relax and make some memorable moments. I also enjoyed the boat ride back to the hotel."

A D.C. trip requires a visit to the Capitol. "I really enjoyed the Capitol," she added. "I thought it was really cool to see inside and go into the House of Representatives. I liked looking at all the art and statues. Lots of history exists in the building and I was just

soaking it up. Plus, we talked with our legislators and discussed some new bills that passed."

Besides lots of walking, each delegate used a Segway for sightseeing. "I think the best part of the trip was Segwaying around D.C. or the Youth Night with other states' delegates. I met so many new people at Youth Night."

For many the Youth Tour is their first major travel experience without parents. "I grew a lot as a person," — Continued on Page 6

### At A Glance



**Replace old AC with efficient heat pump**

If the warm summer temperatures have you feeling less than comfortable in your home, consider replacing your aging air conditioner with a new heat pump. Learn more about the types and technology on Page 5. Co-op rebates may be available too!

## Ask questions before buying a solar system

Free energy from the sun and lower electric bills... How do I sign up?

The benefits of installing solar panels may seem like a no-brainer, but the reality is, not every site (and owner's situation) is always right for solar. Consider several factors before buying a solar system, like determining if your home/site will receive enough sun to achieve your goals, finding the right contractor, negotiating contracts and other details. Keep in mind that during a power outage, your solar system will not supply you power unless you also buy battery storage. Plus, you will still have a monthly service charge from the electric co-op to cover the poles, meter, substation, etc... when solar is not generating.

Investing in solar is a major decision. If you're considering solar, your electric cooperative can help.

### Consider these questions before installing solar

1. What are my goals? If your primary goal is to save money on electric bills, you may achieve this through energy-efficiency action. Does your home have sufficient insulation and efficient windows? Do you have an old heating/cooling system that needs upgrading first? Is it time to upgrade to energy-efficient appliances too? Visit the co-op's website for heat pump and appliance rebate details.

2. Is my roof or site suitable for solar? If your roof is old and in poor shape, it may need to be replaced before panels can be mounted. Additionally, your roof or site should receive a lot of sun. Consider how much sun (and shade) the site receives and if any trees will need to be removed. Solar panels perform best when facing south; keep this in mind as you think about where the panels will be installed.

3. How long will I own the home? If you're considering rooftop solar, you're likely planning to stay in the home for several years. But if you plan to sell the home at some point down the road, consider that not all potential buyers will want to maintain a solar system. If you enter a contract to lease the system, carefully review the terms and what those mean if you sell the property.

4. Lease or purchase? Purchasing a rooftop solar system outright is expensive, which is why many homeowners opt to lease their solar panels. However, federal tax credits can help cover some of the costs for a new system, up to 30 percent. Regardless of how you finance the solar system, secure a few quotes from qualified contractors. Your electric co-op can recommend area contractors that



co-op members have used and trusted.


### Discussion items before signing with solar contract

1. Can the contractor provide up-to-date documentation? It may seem obvious, but request proof and documentation of the contractor's licensing, permitting and other credentials; ask for local referrals. Comb through company reviews, check the contractor's status with the Better Business Bureau. Do your homework on the front end before signing a contract. Go with a local vendor and electrician familiar with local, county and Minnesota ordinances and requirements.

2. Does the contract seem reasonable and fair? If you decide to hire a contractor to install solar, carefully read the fine print of the contract. Do the system performance calculations seem realistic? Does the project timeframe sound reasonable? Negotiate the contract terms to fit your goals and needs.

3. Who maintains the solar panels? Determining who is responsible for maintaining the solar panels depends on who owns the system. If you lease the system from a solar installer, it may be their responsibility. Periodically, solar panels need to be cleaned as dirt, debris and snow impact panel productivity. Parts may also need to be replaced, so it's important to know who will take on these responsibilities.

4. How will I work with the electric co-op? Look at your electric co-op's website first before buying. The system must be connected to the electric grid, so you need to sign an interconnection agreement. We can walk you through the steps, including how our solar rates and fees work. Do not let the solar contractor start work until the co-op application is approved and co-op contract is signed.

Solar panels may help the environment and save on electric bills — just consider the many factors before diving in and installing a system. Do plenty of research upfront, and contact the co-op if you have questions or decide to move forward with an installation. 


## Mini-fridges goes anywhere & offers three ways to chill

Take your travels to new convenience levels with a portable mini-fridge that acts more like a cooler.

Mellif mini-fridge can be powered by plugging it into a normal outlet, plugging it into a vehicle with DC charger cord or use a 20-volt DeWalt Max Battery. You can use the smart phone app to monitor the temperature and change the settings from -4 degrees Fahrenheit to 68 degrees. Use it as a mini freezer or fridge with the portability of a 25-quart-sized cooler. Thick insulation makes it energy efficient.

Imagine the ways you could use it from camping, picnics, fishing trips, road trips, work sites and kids' sporting events. It holds 44 cans of pop or 22 bottles of water. Pack the night before and plug into the outlet at home. Then plug it in while you drive using the DC charger; use the DeWalt Max lithium battery when you get there and plug it back in on the way home.

Fun features include beverage holders and the USB port to recharge your cell phone. The 11-inch handle and wheels make it easy to pull to your final destination.

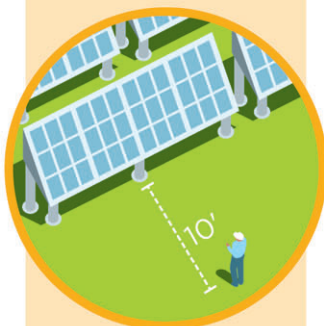
Find it on Amazon for about \$270 (battery not included); it features a five-year warranty. It is nearly 22 inches wide, 13 inches deep and almost 17 inches tall. When cleaning, make sure it is unplugged for safety. 



### Safety

# Safety near solar

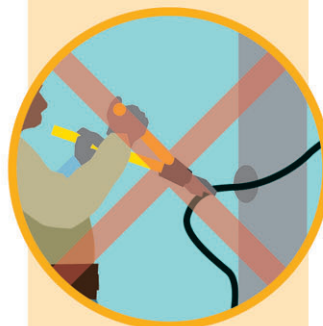
Like any other source of electricity, solar panels can pose potential hazards. Keep these safety tips in mind.



Stay at least 10 feet away from the installation.



Never walk on solar panels.



Never cut any wiring to the solar panels.



Never touch broken or damaged solar panels.

# Brown County Briefs

## Efficiency tip

Placing heat sources, such as lamps, computers or TVs, near your thermostat can result in false temperature readings, increased energy use and inconsistent cooling/heating. Make sure your thermostat is installed in an area clear of obstructions, electronic devices, direct sunlight and drafts. Ensuring your thermostat is free from these types of interferences optimizes energy efficiency, improves indoor comfort and reduces wear and tear on your cooling/heating system.

## Member Advisory Council meets September 9

Current Member Advisory Council members are reminded of the meeting Monday, September 9, beginning with a light meal at 6 p.m. More information will be mailed.


## Changes in late payment notices

Starting in August, Brown County REA will no longer send Reminder Notices to members whose monthly payment is not received by the due date. Instead, a Disconnect Notice will be sent after two missed payments.

## Experiencing mail delays?

Sign up for paperless billing and never miss a statement. Members can sign up to receive e-mail or text notifications when monthly bills are ready. You can also set up an account in the web portal to view and pay your bill online, review past statements and view usage data. Enroll through Member Account Access on our website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

## Board meeting date change

Due to scheduling conflicts, the BCREA Board of Directors will hold its monthly meeting on August 28. 

## Beyond the plug: Load-serving transmission lines carry power to the cooperative's distribution system




**Left side: transmission line. Right: three-phase distribution pole.**

While the co-op's local distribution grid carries electricity to homes, farms and businesses, the electric system has additional infrastructure to deliver more energy over longer distances.

Great River Energy, the wholesale power supplier to Brown County REA, owns and operates transmission lines that operate at higher voltages and carry power from sources such as power plants and wind farms throughout Minnesota.

Transmission lines that carry large amounts of power to communities are referred to as "load-serving" transmission lines. These medium-sized power lines deliver power at voltages between 34.5 kilovolts (kV) and 115 kV. Most homes are served voltages that are a thousand times less (e.g., 115 volts) and make up most of the electric transmission system. Great River Energy owns and operates more than 3,000 miles of transmission lines at these voltages.

Load-serving transmission is an important key to helping deliver reliable energy to your community all day, every day. 


## 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.

## Twins Youth Clinic August 11 in Sleepy Eye

Boys and girls ages 6-12 are invited to participate in the Minnesota Twins free youth clinic Sunday, Aug. 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at Prairieview Field in Sleepy Eye.

Equipment will be provided but participants are asked to bring their own gloves. A partnership between Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier GRE, the Minnesota Twins and the Twins Community Fund, this year's Sleepy Eye event is being hosted by Sleepy Eye Baseball Association. Register at [www.playballmn.com](http://www.playballmn.com). 

# Keep cool this summer with a heat pump option

Thinking about replacing your aging air conditioner? Consider a highly efficient heat pump instead.

Heat pumps have been around for decades, and in that time, technology has come a long way. Here's a closer look at the different types.

The name heat pump does not highlight the benefit of air conditioning that comes with the technology. Heat pumps are highly efficient because they don't use energy to create heat. Instead, they use energy to move heat—into the home in the winter and out of it in the summer. They typically produce about three times more energy than they use.

The most common types of heat pumps are air source and ground source. Air source heat pumps transfer heat from the outside air, even if it isn't particularly warm outside. Ground source, or geothermal heat pumps, transfer heat between your home and the ground. With a lower upfront price tag, air source heat pumps are more common.

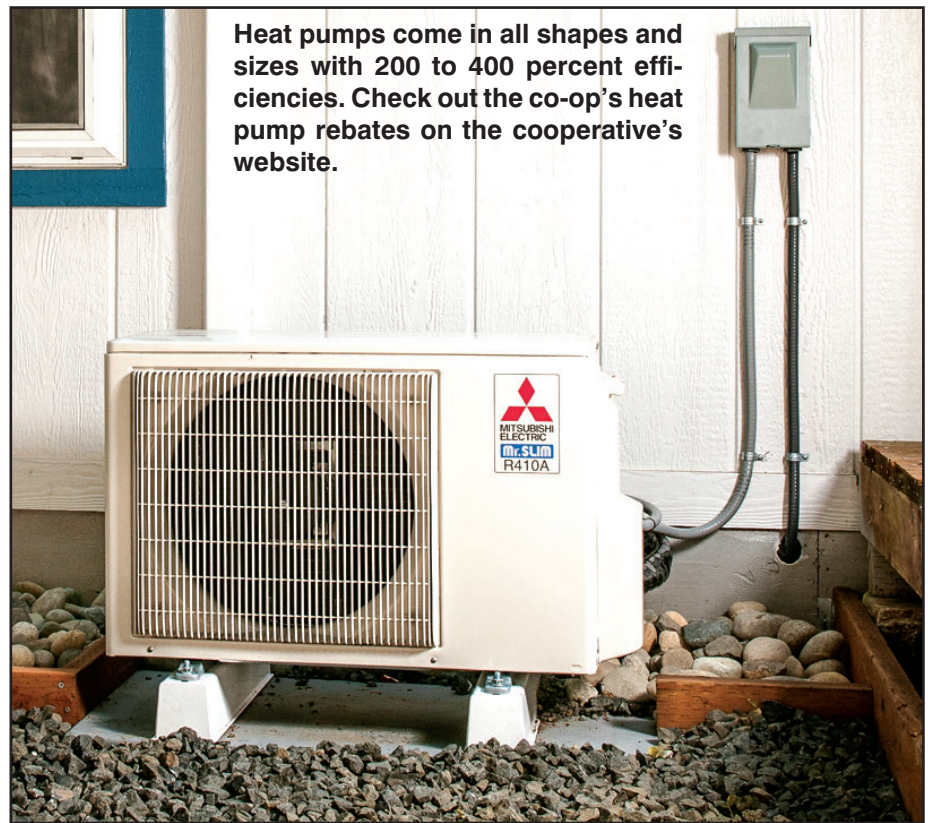
According to the U.S. Department of Energy, air source heat pumps can reduce heating use by about 65% compared to an electric furnace. They come in a variety of styles and configurations to fit different homes. Air source heat pump technology has been popular in warmer climates for decades. There are now cold climate versions available, which work best here in Minnesota.

Here's how each type operates:

Ducted air source heat pumps are ideal for homes with existing ductwork or homes where ductwork can be feasibly added. Replacing an aging central air conditioning system with a heat pump can significantly reduce heating costs.

Ductless heat pumps, or mini-split heat pumps, also draw heat from the outside air. They are a great solution for homes that do not have existing ductwork.

There are many configurations to suit different home layouts. New options on the market allow for coupling with gas




Heat pumps come in all shapes and sizes with 200 to 400 percent efficiencies. Check out the co-op's heat pump rebates on the cooperative's website.

or propane backup heat, which might be a good fit for your home. Ductless heat pumps can be a great option for homes with wood stoves. This can help home air quality, heat the home without gathering wood and provide air conditioning in warmer months.

Geothermal heat pumps transfer heat from the ground to your home. They are even more efficient than air source heat pumps, reducing energy use by 70% to 80%, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. They can also heat water for use in the home, which saves on water heating costs.


Heat pumps are a little different because the heat from the register

doesn't feel quite as warm as oil, electric, natural gas or propane heat. That can take a little getting used to, but the efficiency gains and energy savings make the investment worthwhile.

Before buying a heat pump, compare equipment ratings. The higher the rating, the more efficient the equipment. If it is time to replace your heating system, consider making the switch to a heat pump to conserve energy and potentially save on your electric bills. Brown County REA offers attractive rebates on qualifying heat pumps as well. Contact the office to learn more. 

## Understanding the backup heat feature on a heat pump

Most heat pump systems are installed with a backup or auxiliary heat for cold weather. This auxiliary heat can be electric coils, gas, propane or oil, which is usually more expensive to operate. This helps keep your home warm on cold days, but you don't want to use it if you don't need it.

For some heat pumps turning up the thermostat too quickly or too high can trigger the backup heat. Typically, your thermostat will display emergency or auxiliary heat when using this feature. Talk with your HVAC technician to ensure your thermostat is set to maximize efficiency. 

# Teens explored D.C. monuments, memorials & museums, plus made new Minnesota friends

— Continued from Page 1

thanks to the Youth Tour. I became more mature and can talk to new people more easily. This experience makes me see the world differently and I just feel more knowledgeable. Seeing where everything is being run also gave me a point of view that I have never seen — big things are going on outside my little town; if I work hard, I could be part of it.

“I’ve met friends for life,” she said. “I was so nervous that I wasn’t going to make any friends and now I’m walking away with many. On the last day it all hit us hard that it was the last day of doing activities together. We ended up planning a reunion at Valley Fair next year. I’ve kept in contact with all of my new friends too.”

Jensen encourages other high school students to apply for the co-op’s Youth Tour Contest in December. “I would 100 percent recommend Youth Tour to everyone. I had so much fun seeing D.C. and all of the memorials. You also get to meet some great people and make friends for life. Thank you Brown County REA for this opportunity. I also appreciate all of the chaperones. They made all the activities fun and they made this experience one that I will never forget!”

## Elsa Thompson’s trip highlights

“My favorite memorial was the WWII Memorial with the cool water features,” Thompson said. “I also liked this memorial because it had a pillar for each of the 50 states, so it was cool to see Minnesota. My favorite monument was the Washington Monument. This was my favorite because of how cool and lit up it was at night. We went on a Segway tour and saw the monument at night. A funny story that happened was when we had the Segway tour. I almost got lost at the National Mall because I went the wrong way on the Segway and didn’t notice everyone else going the opposite way.”

Thompson appreciated the Smithsonian Museums too. “I really enjoyed



**Meet the 2024 Minnesota Youth Tour delegation! These 34 students were sponsored by their rural electric cooperative to learn more about their nation’s history, capital and electric cooperatives. The group paused for a photo at the Capitol.**

the Natural History Museum with all of the exhibits. I learned a lot about our planet and the animals that inhabit it.”

D.C.’s architecture is also impressive to these rural teens. “The National Cathedral has great architecture! I also liked to see how it represented so many things, while also being a place of worship.


“The Capitol was a really great experience and I learned a lot,” she added. “My favorite thing there was the rotunda with all of the spectacular art and how tall it was! Visiting our senators was very interesting and informative. We asked questions about topics that pertain to rural electric cooperatives and received some really great answers.”

The delegates traveled back in time with a stop at Mount Vernon. “I enjoyed touring George Washington’s house and seeing what life was like when our county was being born.”

Besides great sights, the people were even better, Thompson said. “I would say the best part of this trip was meeting so many people from so many

different places! I loved learning about how my life differed from a person based on where they lived in the United States. I made a lot of new friends from Minnesota while on the trip. My roommate was from Chanhassen and had two little brothers just like me! I will keep in contact with my roommate and all the other people I made friends with through social media. Youth Tour helped me become more social. I made a lot of new friends and connections from all over the country.”

Thompson encourages other area teens to apply for Federated’s Youth Tour Contest. “I 100 percent recommend Youth Tour to all! It is such a great experience and a great way to see our country’s capital. You meet so many people and make life-long connections and memories with others. Thank you Federated for sponsoring this life changing trip! I would also like to thank all of our chaperones on the trip for always being helpful.”

Watch for details on the 2025 Youth Tour Contest in the December *Connections* newsletter. 

## Open wide! Time to slide in a slider! Share favorite slider recipes

How do you make slider sandwiches for a group? Share your favorite slider recipes with us; what bread, meats, sauces and cheese do you use? Send your favorite slider recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by August 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

### Your electric co-op is closed Labor Day, Monday, September 2



Crews are on call in case of outages

Have a safe holiday weekend!

### Slow Cooker Root Beer BBQ Ribs

by Jean Beckendorf, Welcome

- 2 lb. pork ribs
- 1 c. root beer
- 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. 📧

### Just make the 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 and tiling. Register at [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧

### Rebates await!

- Explore electric co-op's rebates on our website:
- Air source, ductless & ground source heat pumps.
  - Energy Star refrigerators & freezers with proof of recycling the old unit.
  - Energy Star dehumidifier and Smart Thermostats rebates too! 📧

### Manage your home

Arm and disarm your system; automate your lights and thermostat — all from one app!



Subsidiary of your local electric co-op

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**Mike Heidemann**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# Staff Notes

## Understanding upcoming rate adjustments

There are basically four factors that impact your electric bill each month:

- Energy use — The more electricity you use, the higher your energy bill.
- Wholesale power costs — When the costs of power from the wholesale power suppliers go up, overall costs increase.
- Weather — Extreme temperatures increase the demand for cooling or heating. This puts pressure

on the market price of power.

- Equipment costs — Pricing for equipment and materials needed to maintain the electric system have all gone up drastically in recent years.

While you may be able to control the amount of energy you use, you and your co-op can do very little about the other three, which has led to the need to make a change across all rate classes.

Beginning with the September bill payable in October, the Monthly Service Charge collected from each member location to help cover the costs of bringing electricity to your home, farm or business will go up by \$10 per month for all rate classes. This charge accounts for the co-op's investment in poles, wire, transformers and meters to provide safe and reliable electric service to each of the 3,800 plus members spanning more than 1,530 miles of line.


The recent cost-of-service study determined it takes \$76 per month to provide access to electric service to a general single-phase location. With this change, BCREA will be collecting about 68 percent of the actual cost to serve a residential account whether one or 1,000 kilowatt hours are used in the month. The other electric rate being implemented is \$.007 increase for all kilowatt hours used per month. (See the chart on Page 4.)

In 2015 BCREA acquired a portion of service territory formerly served by Alliant Energy. At the time the co-op was required to keep rates the same as charged by Alliant, adjusting gradually with the plan to eventually merge to similar existing BCREA rate classes. This change will also take effect in September. A letter explaining the details of this change will be mailed to all affected members soon.

We appreciate your understanding and continued support, as we navigate these changes together. As always, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions. ☎️

*Coffee with the co-op*

Join us at one of the events below to learn more about the rate adjustment, rebates, cooperative programs and to visit with co-op directors/employees.

 August 14: 9-10 a.m., Carl's Corner, Essig  
August 15: 8-9 a.m., D's Pit Stop, Gibbon

**BROWN COUNTY REA**

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 June 28, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved May 2024 payroll and May financial statement.
- Discussed the processes involved with the merging of former Alliant Energy rates and upcoming rate changes.
- Updated on the plans for the September 9 Member Advisory Council meeting.
- Discussed and approved changes to the past due account notification process to take effect in August.
- Reviewed upcoming Coffee with the Co-op events.
- Designated Director Greg Mages as the BCREA delegate to a special Great River Energy meeting August 1.
- Updated on operations activities including overhead maintenance, service rebuilds and completion of the Eden three-phase project.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and director reports.

The next meeting is set for July 18, 2024, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☎️