

FEBRUARY 2024

# Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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increase and restructure

Energy and economic  
trends and insights

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**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn

**IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
Chuck Soderberg

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

**IAEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
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Kevin Wheeler, Access Energy Cooperative – Managers' Representative

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**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

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editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Libby Teunissen, a Lyon REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

# NEW STATEWIDE BOARD PRESIDENT IS NO STRANGER TO THE CO-OP BOARD ROOM

BY KENNY VANDENBERG



We've all heard the saying that when one door closes, another door opens. It certainly applies to my life as the door to cooperative service opened for me when I retired a while back. Thirteen years ago, I was asked to consider serving on the Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative board in Albia. As a lifelong resident of Monroe County, I thought it would be a great opportunity to serve my community and learn more about my local electric cooperative.

After serving on the local co-op board for several years, I had an opportunity to put my name on the ballot for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) board. I was eager to join the statewide board and expand my industry knowledge and working relationships with others, including our state and federal legislators. Formed in 1942, IAEC is the statewide trade association for Iowa's electric cooperatives, and it provides several services to its member co-ops, including legislative representation, regulatory oversight, training and education services, safety programs, communications support, and advocacy.

## Productive and proactive leadership

Serving on the IAEC board for more than five years, I was honored to take the helm as board president in December. I truly enjoy the camaraderie of working with my fellow statewide directors and the statewide staff. We are productive and proactive in dealing with the issues at hand. In the first half of 2024, the IAEC board will be focused on hiring our next executive vice president/general manager, as Chuck Soderberg plans to retire in July. Identifying the right executive to lead us into the future is one of the statewide board's most important tasks.

This is an unprecedented time of change for the electric industry, and experienced leadership is crucial to successfully navigate the challenges ahead. I look forward to meeting with the directors and managers of Iowa's electric cooperatives throughout the year to learn more about how the statewide association can support them in their mission to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity for their local member-owners.

## Strengthening lines of collaboration

Additionally, I have been serving on the board of the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives for four years. I'd like to explore more ways for these two statewide cooperative associations to collaborate for the benefit of their members while promoting the cooperative business model.

If you had asked me several years ago what I'd be doing after retirement, I couldn't have imagined that I would be serving in this capacity. But these leadership opportunities all started because I was willing to say yes to a local call to serve. I'm thankful for the family and friends who encouraged me along the way.

Here's my advice for my fellow cooperative member-owners throughout Iowa: Don't be afraid to answer the call to serve your local cooperative. Look for an open door in your local community and walk through it! Your next adventure awaits.

*Kenny Vandenberg is the board president for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and a director at Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A CAFÉ™ EXPRESS FINISH TOASTER!

For busy mornings, this innovative two-slot toaster has an Express Finish mode. Just push a button and the extra heating elements kick in, toasting bread to your preferred doneness in just 60 seconds. It also has three other preset functions – bagel, reheat and frozen – plus eight browning levels for customized control. Distinguished by sleek designer finishes, this Café appliance from GE features a beautiful cast aluminum housing with brushed copper accents.

#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Feb. 29. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the HappyLight® Duo Light Therapy and Task Floor Lamp from the December issue was Eugene Sieren, a T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY FEB. 29!

# UPCOMING EVENTS

FEB. 15	Board meeting
FEB. 29	Youth Tour application deadline
MARCH 6	Youth Tour interviews
MARCH 15	All scholarship application deadlines
MARCH 21	Board meeting
MARCH 31	Photo contest deadline

You can access your account information at any time using SmartHub on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) or through the SmartHub app for mobile devices. Use SmartHub to report outages to save time and ensure that it goes directly into our system to notify us. You can also call our office at 866-242-4232 for account information or to report service-related concerns.



*Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.*

**Office:** Access Energy Cooperative  
1800 W. Washington St., P.O. Box 440  
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641  
**Phone:** 319-385-1577 or 866-242-4232  
**Fax:** 319-385-6873  
**Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call):** 8-1-1  
**Website:** [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop](https://facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop)  
**Twitter:** [twitter.com/AccessEnergyC](https://twitter.com/AccessEnergyC)  
**Email:** [contactus@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:contactus@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Office Hours:** Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.  
Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577

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**General Manager/CEO:** Kevin Wheeler

**Editor:** Kimberly Davis

**Assistant Editor:** Cherity Wibben

**Officers and Directors:**

**Marvin Larson**, District 1, President  
[mlarson@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mlarson@accessenergycoop.com)

**Robert Chesnut III**, District 3, Vice President  
[bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com)

**Michael Holtkamp**, District 3, Secretary  
[maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com)

**Robert P. Smith**, District 2, Treasurer  
[rsmith@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:rsmith@accessenergycoop.com)

**Jerry Barker**, District 2, Director  
[jbarker@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:jbarker@accessenergycoop.com)

**Fred Hickenbottom**, District 1, Director  
[fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com)

**David Hollingsworth**, District 1, Director  
[dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com)

**Marvin Newton**, District 3, Director  
[mnewton@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mnewton@accessenergycoop.com)

**Larry White**, District 2, Director  
[lwhite@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:lwhite@accessenergycoop.com)

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# OFFICIAL RATE INCREASE AND RESTRUCTURE NOTICE

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Effective April 1, 2024, Access Energy Cooperative will implement a rate increase and restructure. While the board of directors

does not like to implement rate increases, they strongly believe it is necessary to continue providing exceptional service to the members of the cooperative. Your cooperative is a not-for-profit entity that exists to provide safe, reliable and efficient electric service to its members. Changes to rates are implemented only when they are necessary.

The primary factor driving this change is an increase in the cost of power. The cooperative's power cost accounts for 67% of your bill. In addition, operation and overhead expenses continue to increase.

**As announced in January 2024, the rate structure for single-phase and small commercial accounts will change to include a demand charge. The energy charge for these rate classes will decrease. This change is being made to align members' bills with the cooperative's power cost.**

The board, management and employees of Access Energy Cooperative pride ourselves on being responsible stewards of your resources. While there are factors out of the cooperative's control, such as weather, regulatory compliance, and fuel costs we diligently try to control expenses. To maintain the reliability, quality and financial stability of the service we provide, it is necessary to change our rates due to the continual rise of virtually all aspects of today's cost of living.

For several months, the Access Energy Cooperative board and management team has been thoroughly discussing increasing costs and how they affect the cooperative. Decisions to change rates are taken very seriously. Additional power cost increases are

expected in the future and your board will constantly evaluate the potential impact they will impose. Our power supplier has notified us to expect additional power cost increases in 2025 and potentially subsequent years that may result in additional increases for members.

There are ways to take control of your energy bill. Energy efficiency and rebate programs are available to help you find ways to lower your usage. The SmartHub app allows you to track your usage and set alerts to notify you when you have reached selected usage levels. SmartHub is available to all members for free. You can also use it to view and pay your bill, plus report outages. Sign up for SmartHub on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) or download the SmartHub app on your mobile device.

Access Energy Cooperative will hold three meetings to share information about the rate increase and restructure, to provide education on understanding demand, and to answer member questions. One meeting will be held in each of the cooperative's three districts. All members are invited to attend a meeting and ask questions. Meetings will each begin at 6:30 p.m.

## Details for the rate increase and restructure

To address the current need for a change in rates, Access Energy Cooperative will implement a new rate schedule April 1, 2024.

The chart at the top right shows the new single phase rates compared to the current single phase rates. The second chart shows an example of how sample bills may be affected by the new rates.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns. You can call our office at 866-242-4232 or email us at [contactus@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:contactus@accessenergycoop.com).

*Kevin Wheeler is the general manager CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.*

RATE CHANGE DETAILS

Top chart below: New single phase rates compared to the current single phase rates.

Bottom chart: Example of how sample bills may be affected by the new rates.

MEMBER INFORMATION MEETINGS		
District 1	District 2	District 3
Feb. 22, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.	Feb. 20, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.	Feb. 27, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.
Cambridge Building Jefferson County Fairgrounds 2606 West Burlington Street Fairfield, Iowa	Access Energy Cooperative 1800 West Washington Street Mount Pleasant, Iowa	The Hitching Post 2165 County Rd 103 West Point, Iowa

Base Charge (Monthly)		Energy Charge (per kWh)		Demand Charge (per kW)	
Current Base Charge	New Base Charge	Current Energy Charge	New Energy Charge	Current Demand Charge	New Demand Charge
\$39	\$39	\$0.1052	\$0.0844	\$0.00	\$3.75

Usage	Demand	Current Bill				Bill with Rate Increase				Difference
kWh	kW	Base	Energy	Demand	Total	Base	Energy	Demand	Total	
400	4	\$39.00	\$42.08	\$0.00	\$81.08	\$39.00	\$33.76	\$15.00	\$87.76	\$6.68
800	6	\$39.00	\$84.16	\$0.00	\$123.16	\$39.00	\$67.52	\$22.50	\$129.02	\$5.86
1000	8	\$39.00	\$105.20	\$0.00	\$144.20	\$39.00	\$84.40	\$30.00	\$153.40	\$9.20
1500	10	\$39.00	\$157.80	\$0.00	\$196.80	\$39.00	\$126.60	\$37.50	\$203.10	\$6.30
2500	12	\$39.00	\$263.00	\$0.00	\$302.00	\$39.00	\$211.00	\$45.00	\$295.00	(\$7.00)

# COST INCREASES IN THE ELECTRIC UTILITY INDUSTRY

BY DOUGLAS H. AEILTS



As the energy landscape evolves, many consumers are feeling the pinch of rising costs during this unprecedented period of inflation.

Access Energy Cooperative and its power providers, Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative (Northeast Power) and Associated Electric Cooperative Inc. (Associated), are working diligently to strike a balance among sustainability, reliability and affordability.

The challenges faced by the utility industry are complex and include an array of financial pressures comprised of infrastructure investments, regulatory compliance, fuel price volatility and grid resilience efforts. These issues, combined with a myriad of other factors, contribute to the upward trend in electric utility costs that many consumers are currently experiencing.

## Infrastructure improvements add up

One significant driver of rising electric utility costs is the continuous need for infrastructure investments. Wholesale electric power providers are developing and constructing additional generation and transmission resources to ensure continued high levels of electric reliability. Northeast Power and Associated

must upgrade and maintain their power generation and transmission systems to ensure reliability and meet growing demand. These investments are crucial for enhancing grid resilience and accommodating the increasing electrification of various sectors, such as transportation and heating.

## Impacts of renewable energy

Additionally, the global push towards a cleaner, more sustainable energy future has led to increased adoption of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. While environmentally friendly, integrating these intermittent energy sources into the grid requires substantial investments in energy storage solutions and smart grid technologies. The costs associated with building and maintaining these systems contribute to the overall increase in electric utility expenses. And it is important to remember that because they are intermittent sources, wind and solar today cannot reliably replace natural gas or coal generating stations.

## Regulatory costs

Energy providers are subject to a long list of regulations aimed at ensuring safety, reliability and environmental responsibility. Compliance with these regulations often involves substantial investments in technology and equipment upgrades. For example, meeting emission

standards, improving cybersecurity measures and implementing advanced metering infrastructure all contribute to the rising costs that energy providers face.

Generation and transmission cooperatives are experiencing the same cost pressures we all experience at the grocery store, gas station, bank, hardware store, etc. Most significantly, the cost of fuel used for power generation, whether it be natural gas, coal or other sources, can be highly volatile. Fluctuations in global energy markets directly impact the operational expenses of energy providers. Sudden spikes in fuel prices can significantly elevate the cost of producing electricity, leading to increased utility bills for consumers.

Northeast Power and Associated are working diligently to keep rates as low as possible while managing the financial pressures associated with power generation and transmission. The goal of both organizations is to keep rates as low as possible for Access Energy Cooperative, and, in turn, the members served by Access Energy Cooperative.

*Douglas H. Aeilts is the CEO and general manager of Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative.*

# UNDERSTANDING DEMAND

BY TYLER THEIN, P. E.



At Access Energy Cooperative, we understand that electric bills can be complicated, but understanding your bill can help you learn how to control it.

Generally, utilities charge a basic fee for service, which is called the “Base Charge” for Access Energy Cooperative members. The “Energy Charge” on your bill is the charge for how many kilowatt-hours (kWh) or the amount of electricity you used for the month. Understanding the “Demand Charge” of an energy bill is more complicated and may require some additional explanation.

## What is demand?

Electric demand is the rate at which electricity is used at a given time and is measured in kilowatts (kW). Beginning April 1, 2024, single-phase and small commercial accounts will be charged for demand, and the energy charge will be reduced. Large commercial and large power accounts are already charged for demand.

The “Demand Charge” listed on your bill represents the 15-minute interval when you used the highest amount of electricity during that billing period. There is also the



## EXAMPLE OF HOW DEMAND WORKS

Appliance	Demand
Average washing machine	0.7 kW
Average dishwasher	1.8 kW
Washing machine + dishwasher when used together	2.5 kW

date and time printed next to the demand indicating when you set that demand.

To put this into context, think about how your dishwasher and washing machine both use electricity. The amount of electricity they use is the same regardless of when you use them. If you use them at the same time, you demand more electricity at that time. If you use them at different times, your demand is lower.

## Example of demand scenario

When your washing machine runs for an hour, it uses 0.7 kW – which is your demand on our system for power. When your dishwasher runs for an hour, it uses 1.8 kW. If you run both at the same time, your demand would be 2.5 kW. Your demand becomes the

total of the two because you need that much power at the same time.

If you change your habits and run only one of them at a time, your highest demand for those two hours would be 1.8 kW, because it is the most demand you used at one time. The highest demand you set in one month is the highest amount of electricity used at once during a 15-minute interval in your billing cycle. The best way to reduce demand is by spreading your electric usage over time.

If you have questions about your electric bill, or questions about demand, please contact us at 866-242-4232.

*Tyler Thein is the director of engineering for Access Energy Cooperative.*

## FORD LIGHTNING EV

The following is the data for the cooperative's Ford Lightning electric pickup from last month.

- 1,296 miles driven.
- Total charge time of 109 hours and 15 minutes with a Level 2 charger.
- Total 885 kWh for charging.
- \$110.63 in total electricity costs at \$0.125 per kWh.
- Converted to gallons of gas (at \$3.50/gallon), this compares to 41.56 gallons of fuel.

## TRACK ENERGY USE WITH SMARTHUB



Did you know you can see your energy usage on your phone, desktop or other mobile device?

Through the SmartHub app, you can monitor and download your daily energy consumption 24/7 and see how it is trending over time. SmartHub can even alert you when a set usage level is exceeded.

Visit [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) for more information.

# YOUTH PROGRAM APPLICATION DEADLINES

## Youth Tour Applications – Due Feb. 29

Access Energy Cooperative sends two students each year to Washington, D.C. Applicants must be a high school sophomore or junior; they are not required to be members of the cooperative. The trip takes place June 15-21, 2024. Personal interviews to choose the two student representatives will be held at our office March 6, 2024. You must be able to participate in an interview on that date to participate.

## Scholarship Applications – Due March 15

Access Energy Cooperative is offering six, \$1,500 scholarships to high school seniors. Applicants must be a high school senior receiving post-secondary education. Parents or legal

guardians must be members of the cooperative.

## Lineworker Scholarship Applications – Due March 15

Up to two \$2,000 scholarships may be awarded per year to students enrolled, or planning to enroll, in a one- or two-year electric line worker program. Applicants are not required to be members of the cooperative.

### Obtain an application

Details about each program, including applications, can be found on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com). Applications can also be obtained at qualifying area high school guidance counselor offices or by contacting our office at 866-242-4232.



## UTILITY WORKERS APPRECIATION DAY

March 8 is recognized annually as Utility Workers Appreciation Day in Iowa! This day is recognized in appreciation of the critical work utility workers do 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Thank you to our utility workers for your endless contributions to our cooperative and to the communities we serve.

## CALL FOR DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS

Your board of directors is elected by and from the membership of Access Energy Cooperative. Four seats are up for election in 2024, one in each of Districts 1 and 3, and two in District 2. Three of the board members are to be elected to a term of three years and one (District 2) will be elected to a term of two years.

Terms that will expire with the 2024 annual meeting to be held Tuesday, Aug. 6, include:

- **District 1:** Marvin Larson
- **District 2:** Larry White and Jerry Barker
- **District 3:** Robert Chesnut III

The board of directors has appointed the nominating committee to select candidates to run for the expiring terms. Anyone interested in running for a seat on the board may contact a member of the nominating committee.

The committee members are listed below and on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com). Or you can call our office at 866-242-4232.

## 2024 NOMINATING COMMITTEE

### District 1

- Joe Heckethorn, Stockport
- Dennis Smithburg, Batavia
- Kenneth Whitham, Fairfield

### District 2

- Tina Mullin, Mt. Pleasant
- Bob Scarff, Mt. Pleasant
- Randy White, Mt. Pleasant

### District 3

- Myrna Folker, Donnellson
- Dave Lowenberg, West Point
- Dean Mabeus, Wever

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## BACON POTATO CHOWDER

- 8 slices bacon (½ pound)
- ½-1 cup onion, chopped
- 2 cups potatoes, chopped
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 1 can condensed cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1½ cups milk
- cheddar cheese, optional

Cut bacon into ½-inch pieces. In a 3-quart saucepan, cook bacon over medium heat until browned. Add onion and continue cooking, 2-3 minutes until tender, drain. Add potatoes, water, salt and pepper. Continue cooking 15-20 minutes until potatoes are tender.

Reduce heat to low, stir in soup, sour cream and milk. Continue cooking, 3-5 minutes, stirring occasionally until heated through. Season to taste and top with cheese, if desired. *Serves 4-6*

**Peg Visser • Sheldon  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

## CREAMY SQUASH SOUP

- 7 pounds butternut or other winter squash variety
- 2 large, sweet onions, chopped
- olive oil
- water
- ¼ teaspoon rosemary
- ½ teaspoon sage
- 1 tablespoon salt, or to taste
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional

Bake butternut squash whole at 350 degrees F for approximately 1 hour, until soft when poked with a large fork at the stem end. Remove from oven and let cool. Cut open and remove seeds. Winter squash, if used, will need to be cut in half before baking cut-side down until tender.

Sauté onions in enough oil to keep from sticking. Sauté on high at first to get hot, then on low until onions are clear. Stir more frequently after onions are clear. Sauté until brown and caramelized (do not burn). Blend 1½ cups squash with ⅓ of the onions with just enough water to be smooth and mostly pourable. Repeat two more times. Stir all batches together in slow cooker or heavy-bottomed soup pot. Add rosemary, sage, salt and cayenne pepper, if desired. Simmer for ½ hour or until seasoning flavor comes out. Serve piping hot. Leftovers can be frozen. *Serves 6*

**Jacque Minikus • Pisgah  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**



Looking for a new recipe? Search our free archive of tried-and-true recipes from rural Iowa kitchens! Search by keyword, category or main ingredient: [ieclmagazine.com/recipes](http://ieclmagazine.com/recipes)

## TATOR TOT SOUP

- 1 32-ounce bag tater tots
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 can cream of celery soup
- 8 ounces sour cream
- 2 cups milk
- 1 pound ham, chopped or cooked bacon
- 1 tablespoon parsley flakes
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Combine all ingredients in a slow cooker. Cook on high for 4 hours or low for 5-7 hours. Add more milk during cooking if a thinner consistency is desired. *Serves 6-8*

**Stacy Venteicher • Glidden  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative**

## CREAMY CHICKEN TACO SOUP

- 1 15.25-ounce can no salt added black beans
- 1 15.25-ounce can no salt added whole kernel corn
- 1 10-ounce can mild diced tomatoes and green chilies
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 3-4 chicken breasts, cooked and diced
- 1 ounce taco seasoning
- 1 tablespoon dry minced onion
- 8 ounces cream cheese
- corn chips, optional
- cheddar cheese, optional

Drain and rinse beans, drain corn. Add the first seven ingredients to a slow cooker. Cook on low for 6 hours. Stir in cream cheese, and top with corn chips and cheddar cheese, if desired.

**Angie Graeve • Reinbeck  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

## HUNTER STEW

- 2 pounds venison
- 4 carrots
- 2 onions, sliced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 4 potatoes, chunked
- 2 cups stewed tomatoes
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup

Chop venison into 1-inch cubes. Cut carrots into 1-inch chunks. Mix all ingredients together in roaster pan. Cook at 250 degrees F for 4 hours.

**Jeff Gropper • Chelsea  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative**

## HEARTY HAM SOUP

- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- 2 cups raw potatoes, diced
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup flour
- 3 cups milk
- 1 10-ounce package frozen peas, thawed
- 1¼ cups cooked ham, diced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon marjoram
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon celery salt
- blue cheese wedge, optional

In a heavy, 2-quart saucepan, melt butter. Add onion, potatoes and water. Cover and bring to steam. Lower heat to simmer, then cook about 15 minutes, until potatoes are tender. Stir in flour, then slowly add milk. Cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Stir in peas, ham, salt, marjoram, pepper and celery salt. Let simmer until peas are cooked, about 5 minutes. Serve hot and add a wedge of blue cheese crumbled over soup, if desired. *Serves 4-6*

**Marcia Rich • Lockridge  
Access Energy Cooperative**

**WANTED:**

## TURKEY DISHES

**THE REWARD:**

**\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is Feb. 29**

Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. Also provide the number of servings per recipe.



**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

**MAIL:** Recipes

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* • 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48,  
Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

# INDUSTRY LEADERS SHARE ENERGY INSIGHTS AND TRENDS

In December, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) held its 2023 Annual Meeting at the Sheraton West Des Moines Conference Center with more than 350 registered attendees. At the event, which carried the theme “Powerful Connections,” board directors and employees from Iowa’s locally owned electric co-ops received informative updates from the statewide board and staff, in addition to learning about industry trends and best practices from invited speakers.

## Leaders share insights and perspectives on future trends

The IAEC Annual Meeting also provided the opportunity for attendees to learn more about the electric industry and future trends that may impact rural Iowa’s economy and quality of life.

IAEC presented several educational sessions, including hearing from the following industry leaders:

- Author, podcaster and film producer **Robert Bryce** discussed the physical and barriers to a rapid transition from carbon-based energy sources. He provided a realistic forecast about how our electric grid will change in the coming decades.
- **Kavi Chalwa** and **Jeff Kappen** from Bâton Global discussed disorder in geopolitics and how it will influence economic growth on various scales. They provided insights on how Iowa’s electric cooperatives can best navigate these challenges for organizational success.
- **Mark Tiemeier** of the Midwest Reliability Organization (MRO) informed attendees about how changes in the electric generation mix and resources challenge grid operators. Tiemeier is responsible for leading MRO’s annual regional risk assessment.

*Editor’s note: The information on the next page is a high-level overview of some points covered during each speaker’s presentation and are the perspectives and opinions of the speakers based on their knowledge and research. Their points address what they believe to be issues or concerns of interest for utilities, including electric cooperatives.*

# POWERFUL CONNECTIONS

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

## ROBERT BRYCE



Robert Bryce is a Texas-based author, journalist, film producer, and podcaster. The host of the Power Hungry Podcast, Bryce has been writing about energy, power, innovation and politics for more than 30 years. His articles have appeared in many publications, including the Wall Street Journal,

New York Times, Forbes, Time, Austin Chronicle and Sydney Morning Herald.

### Key points

- There are significant land use conflicts when it comes to building more wind, solar and high-voltage transmission. In the past nine years, at least 603 wind and solar projects have been rejected in the U.S.
- Since 2000, the U.S. has reduced CO2 emissions the most of the world's six largest economies. Four countries – the U.S., U.K., Germany and Japan – have reduced emissions, while India and China have increased emissions. In fact, China has increased more than eight-fold over U.S. emissions.

- The U.S. Department of Energy says the nation needs a 57% increase in high-voltage transmission. Currently, there are 240,000 miles of high-voltage transmission in the U.S. From 2008 to 2021, 1,700 miles per year were built in the U.S. At this rate, it will take 80 years to meet the forecasted need for high-voltage transmission.
- Utility product cost inflation is at an all-time high, increasing by 33% since 2020. There is a one- to three-year wait for transformers. Foreign companies dominate the high-power transformer market.
- Since 2008, when then Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger mandated renewable energy use, California's electric rates have grown 3.2 times faster than the rest of the U.S.
- China dominates the entire downstream electric vehicle battery supply chain.
- For the first time, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation cited “energy policy” as a threat to the reliability and resilience of the bulk power system.
- Energy security is national security.

## KAVI CHALWA



Kavi Chalwa has spent the majority of his career as a strategy advisor and consultant to private and public-sector organizations, supporting them with the development and execution of their global growth strategies. Prior to transitioning into an advisory role, Kavi was in the investment banking industry. Kavi's sector expertise includes energy. His

regional expertise is focused on high-growth markets, especially the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

### Key points

Recommends businesses and energy providers pursue an aggressive “Iowa and Me” internationalization strategy by:

- Diversifying our trade relationships to target countries that align with Iowa's economic growth clusters and that have high levels of current and projected future alignment to U.S. policies on the Chinese Communist Party.
- Building relationships with third-country-based investors to attract investment into Iowa-based business, Iowa-based innovation and Iowa-based research.
- Flexing Iowa's muscle to protect and mitigate downside impacts of restrictive policies on Iowa businesses.
- Flexing Iowa's muscle to create favorable conditions for accelerating entry into new growth markets for Iowa businesses.
- Mobilizing the collective power of commodity and association groups to serve as a force multiplier for Iowa businesses.

## MARK TIEMEIER



Mark Tiemeier, P.E., MBA, is a highly experienced electrical professional with focused expertise in the power systems and regulatory fields. He has extensive knowledge in modeling transmission components. The Midwest Reliability Organization is a non-profit organization dedicated to the reliability and security of the bulk power

system in the central region of North America, including parts of both the U.S. and Canada.

### Key points

Extreme weather, consumer demand, and changes in technology and generation resources continue to present a rapidly increasing number of challenges to grid planners and operators. Physical and cybersecurity risks also continue to evolve at an unprecedented pace. The top risks to electric reliability are primarily being impacted by the following factors:

- Conventional, baseload generation (e.g., coal) is being retired and replaced with dispersed, variable generation (e.g., wind and solar), tightening reserve margins.
- Increasingly bold cybercriminals seek to exploit vulnerabilities in utilities' networks to disrupt normal operations of the grid.
- Extreme weather continues to cause generating resource outages, limiting energy supply at the same time as demand increases.
- Increasing amounts of generating resources that are physically distant from load is straining transmission capacity and limiting import capability.

# FORCES SHAPING THE U.S. RURAL ECONOMY IN 2024

BY COBANK

The U.S. economy has remained remarkably steady despite an unrelenting series of shocks over the last three years. America's economic resilience was again displayed throughout 2023 as the Federal Reserve continued the most aggressive round of interest rate hikes the country has seen in more than 40



years. Steadfast consumer spending has fueled the economy through much of the recent adversity. However, lingering high prices

are expected to take a bigger toll on the economy in 2024, according to a comprehensive year-ahead outlook report from CoBank's Knowledge Exchange.

The report examines several key factors that will shape agriculture and market sectors, which serve rural communities throughout the U.S. Some of those include the following:

## **U.S. Economy: Consumer Sentiment More Important than Economic Data**

Key indicators point to the strength of the U.S. economy. Headline inflation has plummeted to 3.1%, the unemployment rate remains below 4% and inflation-adjusted wages are growing. However, many U.S. consumers remain anxious about their financial situations, given high grocery prices, skyrocketing mortgage rates and other inflationary pressures. Grocery inflation is running at about 2%; however, the price of food at home has risen by 25% in the past three years.

## **U.S. Government: Vital Funding Bills Await Dysfunctional Congress**

The difficulties of governing with slim majorities in both the House and Senate are in clear focus as 2024 draws near. Until Congress can complete its work appropriating discretionary funding, little progress can be made on other major legislation like the Farm Bill.

## **U.S. Agricultural Economy: High Costs Spell Lackluster Profitability for Farm Incomes**

Higher interest rates, a strong U.S. dollar and the resilience of the national economy have weighed heavily on agricultural commodity prices. The biggest problem for farm margins heading into 2024 is the elevated cost of production. While fertilizer prices have fallen, other costs of production remain stubbornly high. The northern hemisphere will likely have a strong El Niño weather pattern during the growing season for the first time since 2015.

## **Grains, Farm Supply and Biofuels: Renewable Diesel Will Shift More Acres to Soybeans**

The renewable diesel boom and the smaller U.S. soybean harvest of 2023 will drive an expansion of soybean acreage in 2024. Both ethanol producers and soybean crushers are benefiting from rising demand for biofuels. The grain and oilseed price outlook hinges largely on the value of the U.S. dollar, conditions of wheat in Russia, and harvests of corn and soybeans in South America.

## **Food and Beverage: Consumers Seek Value Amid Elevated Prices**

Elevated prices will continue to impact consumer shopping behavior.

Cost-saving behaviors, including purchasing from lower-cost retailers, trading down to private-label brands and value shopping, will likely linger.

## **Power and Energy: Global Discord Underscores Need for Energy Security**

Global conflicts create significant uncertainty for commodity markets and energy prices. Complicating matters further, global suppliers are reconciling the prospect of an accelerated energy transition with the realities of today's fossil fuel-dependent economies. The World Bank asserts that if conflict-driven market disruptions escalate, oil prices could blow past \$150 per barrel in 2024.

## **Communications: Despite Tailwinds, Broadband Buildouts Face Obstacles**

The broadband market will remain a bright spot for the U.S. economy in 2024. Investments flowing into the industry are unprecedented. However, telecom operators face several obstacles to executing their network buildout plans on time and on budget. The challenges include the available labor market, tightening credit conditions and managing through the permitting process, which has proven to be a bottleneck for fiber builds. A significant amount of network build work scheduled for 2024 means many contractors are already booked up to a year out.

*CoBank is one of the largest private providers of credit to the U.S. rural economy. The bank delivers loans, leases and other financial services to agribusiness, rural infrastructure and Farm Credit customers in all 50 states.*



Scan this QR code to read the full report.

# EFFICIENCY TIPS FOR MANUFACTURED HOMES

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE



If you live in a manufactured home, there are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy.

Photo Source: Brian Wangenheim

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. This represents 15% of housing in rural areas and 3% in urban areas.

If you live in a manufactured home, there are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy – including a variety of home improvement to-dos, such as air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation, and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

## Understanding your home's construction

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps point to where you can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price point can come partly from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you are considering buying a manufactured home, ENERGY STAR®-certified manufactured homes are 30% more energy efficient than standard models, with various options that increase the home's energy efficiency.

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that

manufactured homes are constructed in sections. One section is a single-wide home, two are combined to make a double-wide home and three make a triple-wide home.

## Common challenges

The biggest efficiency issues often come from duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the home. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of each section of the home, with the registers or vents cut into it.

If you think this may be an issue in your manufactured home, the first step is to ensure all registers are accessible, open, and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check your ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow, so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction.

If you have a double-wide or triple-wide, you will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to

protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. That's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

## Other energy efficiency measures

Another place to check for efficiency issues is the joint joining of the sections of a double-wide or triple-wide-together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional.

Often, weatherization assistance programs provide discounted and no-cost energy-saving upgrades. Check with your county or electric co-op for more information.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



Damaged or disconnected ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home.

Photo Source: Efficiency Services Group

# CYBERSECURITY BEGINS WITH PROACTIVE MEASURES

Electric cooperatives recognize the evolving cyber threat landscape that poses disruptions to the nation's electric grid. As responsible providers of power to our member-consumers, co-ops are taking proactive measures to secure the grid.

Cyber threats, ranging from phishing to compromised passwords, can disrupt power reliability. That's why electric co-ops continually assess vulnerabilities, monitor emerging threats and implement cybersecurity defense measures. By securing the grid against cyber threats, co-ops ensure a more reliable power supply, reducing the risk of disruptions.

Electric co-ops implement multiple cybersecurity strategies to utilize a defense-in-depth approach, emphasizing concern for our local communities and the importance of reliability for our members.

Co-ops deploy advanced monitoring and protection systems that

continuously analyze network traffic, detect suspicious activity and alert security personnel to potential problems. Additionally, co-ops regularly practice security audits to identify vulnerabilities, assess risks, and implement necessary updates and patches to safeguard critical infrastructure.

### A collaborative effort

Electric co-ops regularly engage with other co-ops, industry organizations, government agencies and cybersecurity experts to share best practices, develop lessons learned and stay current on the latest threats.

We also understand the importance of educating all employees on the latest cybersecurity issues, best practices and the significance of adhering to security protocols.

In addition to internal measures, co-ops establish dedicated cybersecurity points of contact so members can easily identify

individuals to discuss any cyber-related concerns. Co-op members are regularly targeted by energy scammers, whether through dishonest claims, messages sent as emails or phone scams from people falsely claiming to represent the co-op. By identifying and reporting these incidents, you can help keep our co-op community safe from cyber threats and scams.

### Commitment to reliability and security

Electric co-ops remain committed to providing reliable power to the members we serve. Our top priority is to keep your information secure and your lights on.

We will continue working hard to strengthen the grid, keep data safe and ensure the long-term well-being of our local communities. In the face of increasing cyber threats, these proactive measures provide a foundation for a robust and secure electric grid.



## ENTER TO WIN

### RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution. To be considered, email photos to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com) with "**Cover Submission**" in the subject line.

Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.



# REPORT ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY IN OR NEAR SUBSTATIONS AND OTHER ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

Substations are part of the electrical generation, transmission and distribution system. Transformers are contained inside many of them, and this equipment transforms voltage from high to low or vice versa, depending on their location within the distribution path.

No one should approach a substation, touch the fence or enter the gate unless they are authorized to do so. Paying attention to individuals and activity around substations and other utility equipment helps keep everyone safe.

## Monitoring suspicious activity

1. Individuals in street clothes working near or on utility equipment.
2. Vehicles or trucks in the area without utility branded logos or information.
3. Suspicious behavior including non-utility employees tampering with utility poles, meters, pad-mount transformers or other equipment.

Please report these things to the utility, in addition to things like

open or unlocked gates, a damaged fence or obvious damage to equipment inside the fence.

Call 911 if you see the following: smoke or fire, non-utility workers inside the substation fence. Never try to address an issue yourself.

## First responder safety

First responders should always wait for the go-ahead from the electric utility before addressing issues at a substation, power plant or solar farm, downed power lines or damaged pad-mount transformer.

## General substation safety

1. Never go near a substation.
2. Teach children to never go near a substation or climb its fence for any reason. Let them know they should always stay away and tell a parent or adult to report the incident at 866-242-4232.
3. Never try to extinguish a transformer that is on fire since water and electricity do not mix. Call 911 to report the fire.

## TREE TRIMMING FOR SAFETY, RELIABILITY AND EFFICIENCY

The Access Energy Cooperative vegetation management program aims to provide a proactive approach to maintaining reliable power in a safe, efficient manner.

### Safety first

Overgrown vegetation poses a safety risk. For example, a tree touching a power line in a member's yard can pose danger for the family living there. Maintaining vegetation eliminates trees touching power lines and reduces the chance of limbs falling during a storm. This not only makes the property safer for our members, but it also allows a line worker to restore power quicker and work in a safer environment.

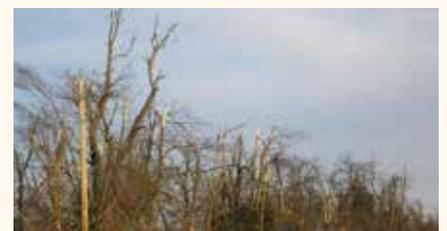
### Reliability

Strategically keeping the lines clear of trees and other vegetation reduces the frequency of outages caused by downed lines or limbs falling into them.

### Efficiency

Access Energy Cooperative is an electric cooperative, which means we operate for the needs of our members, not to secure a profit. Trees growing too close to power lines can cause expensive needed repairs. Taking care of the trees in an efficient proactive method reduces expensive outages that can occur at the most inconvenient times.

We strive to let members know when we will be working an area to maintain vegetation. If you ever have questions about our vegetation management program, contact 866-242-4232 or through our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com).





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Visit our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)



# WHERE WE FIND POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS WE WILL EMPOWER OUR MEMBERS TO LIVE THEIR PASSIONS



Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
*The power of human connections®*

As your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**, we are your energy community. The power we provide is much more than a way to keep the lights on, it plugs into the family, friends, and neighbors that make up your local co-op.