

● FEBRUARY 2026

Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Working together to lower
energy demand**

**Youth program deadlines
approaching**

Recipes: Cajun classics

Enter the safety poster contest for a chance to win \$100 ► See Page 11

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the land

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ON THE COVER

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

LOVE IS IN THE AIR AND ON THESE PAGES

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN



Love is in the air in February, and Valentine's Day gives us an opportunity to share heartfelt messages of adoration. It is also a fitting

time to reflect on something we care deeply about at *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*. Each month, we have the privilege of creating a magazine for you, our electric cooperative member-consumers, and that connection is at the heart of everything we do.

This magazine has always been about more than turning pages. It is about strengthening ties to your local electric cooperative, sharing stories rooted in Iowa communities and offering practical information you can use every day. Whether it is a recipe clipped for later, an energy tip put into action, a safety tip that prevents an injury or a story that sparks conversation at the kitchen table, our goal is to serve you well.

Powered by our readers

One of the things we love most is the engagement we receive from readers across the state. You send in cover photo submissions that showcase Iowa's beauty in every season. You share favorite recipes that turn into family-tested meals for kitchens far beyond your own. You suggest story ideas, enter contests, respond to features and let us know what resonates with you.

That kind of participation does more than fill pages. It reminds us that this magazine is not a one-way conversation. It is a shared space where your voices, creativity and experiences help guide what we publish. When you take the time to reach out, you help make *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* stronger and more relevant for everyone.

This magazine also reaches beyond individual readers. It is shared with community leaders, policymakers and others who help shape decisions affecting rural Iowa. By telling local stories and explaining how electric cooperatives work, these pages help build understanding of the cooperative model and the value it brings to the communities we serve.

Connecting locally, living cooperatively

Your readership reinforces something we believe deeply. This publication matters because it reflects what matters locally. Readers consistently show that they value content that helps them feel informed, connected and engaged with their electric cooperative. That includes learning how cooperatives work, understanding cooperative principles and seeing how local co-ops serve their communities every day.

We hope these pages also encourage you to take part in cooperative life beyond the magazine. Attend your cooperative's annual meeting. Vote for directors who help guide important decisions. Participate in youth programs, educational opportunities or advocacy efforts that give member-consumers a voice. These experiences strengthen the cooperative business model and keep it rooted in local leadership.

At its core, *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* exists to support the same mission as your local electric cooperative. It is about service, transparency, education and community. As we move through February and beyond, thank you for reading, engaging and being part of this shared effort. We look forward to continuing to serve you and your community, one issue at a time.

Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN AN ECOBEE SMART THERMOSTAT!

The ecobee smart thermostat automatically adjusts to your set schedule to save energy when you're gone and optimize for comfort when you're home. Fine-tune your comfort on the thermostat's color touchscreen or from the ecobee app. Works with major smart home ecosystems like Apple HomeKit.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Feb. 28. 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 smart bird feeder from the December issue was **Julie Tjepkes**, a **Grundy County REC** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY FEB. 28!

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEB. 21	Board meeting
FEB. 28	Youth Tour application deadline
MARCH 12	Youth Tour interviews
MARCH 15	Scholarship application deadline
MARCH 15	Lineworker Scholarship application deadline
MARCH 19	Board meeting
MARCH 31	Poster contest entry deadline

You can access your account information at any time using SmartHub on our website at 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.

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

CALL FOR DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS

Your board of directors is elected by and from the membership of Access Energy Cooperative. Three seats are up for election in 2026, one in each of Districts 1, 2 and 3.

Each of the board members is to be elected to a term of three years. Terms that will expire with the 2026 annual meeting to be held Tuesday, Aug. 4, are:

District 1: David Hollingsworth

District 2: Jerry Barker

District 3: Michael Holtkamp

The board of directors has appointed a nominating committee that will select candidates to run for the expiring terms. Any member interested in running for a seat on the board can call our office at 866-242-4232 or contact a member of the nominating committee. The nominating committee list is posted in our office lobby and on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com.

THANK YOU AREA LEGISLATORS!

The Access Energy Cooperative board and staff greatly appreciate the time our area legislators took out of their busy schedules to meet and discuss upcoming legislative issues that could impact the electric industry and our members.



Pictured from left: Rep. Jeff Shipley, Rep. Taylor Collins, Rep. Mathew Rinker, Rep. Heather Hora, Sen. Adrian Dickey and Sen. Dawn Driscoll attended the co-op's legislative breakfast in December.

UTILITY WORKERS APPRECIATION DAY

In 2022, Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a proclamation recognizing March 8 annually as Utility Workers Appreciation Day in Iowa. This day is recognized in appreciation of the critical work utility workers do 24/7.

Thank you to our utility workers for your endless contributions to our Access Energy Cooperative and your countless contributions to the communities we serve.



OFFICIAL RATE INCREASE NOTICE

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Effective April 1, 2026, Access Energy Cooperative will implement a rate increase. While none of us like to implement rate increases, the board of directors strongly believes 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 factors driving this change include an increase in the

cost of power, which accounts for 67% of your bill, and overhead cost increases. The board, management, and employees of Access Energy Cooperative take pride in 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 regulate 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 in all aspects of today's cost of living.

There are ways for you 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 so you can identify habits that cause unnecessary use of power. SmartHub is a free app available to all members that can also be used to view and pay your bill and report outages. Sign up for SmartHub on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com or download the SmartHub app on your mobile device.

The chart below shows an example of how an average single phase member's bill may be affected by the new rates.

Sample Bill Comparison Based on the Average Usage and Demand for Members on the Single Phase Rate

Usage	Demand	Current Bill				Bill with Rate Increase				Difference
kWh	kW	Base	Energy	Demand	Total	Base	Energy	Demand	Total	
1,115	8.32	\$39.00	\$94.11	\$31.20	\$164.31	\$42.00	\$94.78	\$35.78	\$172.56	\$8.25

To address the current need for a change in rates, Access Energy Cooperative will implement the new rate schedule on April 1, 2026.

Single Phase Rate

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
\$39.00	\$42.00	\$0.0844	\$0.085	\$3.75	\$4.30

Small Commercial Rate

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
\$70.00	\$75.00	\$0.0822	\$0.0835	\$6.00	\$6.25

Large Commercial Rate

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
\$165.00	\$185.00	\$0.0545	\$0.057	\$19.00	\$19.30

Large Power Rate

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
\$200.00	\$205.00	\$0.0497	\$0.0524	\$21.00	\$21.30

WORKING TOGETHER TO LOWER DEMAND

BY TYLER THEIN, P.E.



When outdoor temperatures drop, electricity use naturally rises. Colder weather drives us indoors, where

we rely more heavily on home heating systems, more lighting and household appliances. Heating systems run longer and more frequently to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures. Combine that with the fact that most people use electricity at the same times – typically in the mornings and early evenings – and the result is significant pressure on our electric grid.

Access Energy Cooperative works closely with Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative (Northeast Power), our local transmission cooperative, to plan for these seasonal weather patterns to ensure you have reliable power every day of the year. This partnership involves detailed resource and infrastructure planning to make certain electricity is available whenever you need it. However, it's important to remember that our local system is part of a much larger regional and national electric grid.

When demand outpaces supply

During the winter months, when homes and businesses across the country are using more electricity simultaneously, overall demand can approach – or occasionally exceed – available supply. This is especially true during severe weather events, such as ice storms, sudden temperature drops or equipment malfunctions, which reduce generation capacity.

In rare cases when demand threatens to outpace supply, the regional grid operator may call for temporary, controlled outages – often referred to as controlled service interruptions – to prevent broader system failures. Access Energy Cooperative has not yet had to implement a call for these types of controlled service interruptions, and we hope we are never called to do so. However, if such a situation should arise, Access Energy Cooperative would provide timely updates and information to members.

Strengthening reliability year-round

To prepare for these scenarios and minimize risks, together Access Energy Cooperative and Northeast Power take proactive measures to strengthen reliability year-round. These include routine system

maintenance, investments in grid modernization and comprehensive disaster response planning. These proactive steps are designed to ensure our portion of the grid remains resilient even under extreme conditions. Yet, maintaining a reliable electric system requires a collective effort, and every member plays an important role in lowering demand when the grid is under stress.

You can help by taking simple actions during periods of high electricity use, especially on the coldest days of winter:

- 1 Lower your thermostat slightly.** Even reducing the temperature by a few degrees can help.
- 2 Delay using large appliances during peak hours, especially in the early evening.** Run dishwashers, washing machines and dryers during off-peak hours – typically midday or late evening.
- 3 Adjust your water heater.** Setting it to 120 degrees F and spacing out showers helps conserve both energy and hot water.
- 4 Use space heaters sparingly.** Unplug them when you leave the room.

Understanding how winter weather impacts electricity demand is key to maintaining system reliability. By practicing simple energy conservation habits at home, you not only save money on your monthly bill – you also help strengthen the resilience of the grid that powers our community. Together, through small actions and shared awareness, we can ensure that our homes remain warm, our lights stay on and our local grid continues to serve us reliably throughout the season.

Tyler Thein, P.E., is the director of engineering for Access Energy Cooperative.

POWER UNDER PRESSURE

Four Ways to Ease Grid Strain This Winter

Energy use spikes during periods of extremely cold weather, which adds strain to the electric grid. When our community works together to reduce energy use, we can make a big impact in supporting reliability. Here are four simple ways you can help:

1. Lower your thermostat. Even a difference of a few degrees can help.
2. Delay using large appliances. Run them in the evenings or midday when demand is lower.
3. Lower your water heater to 120 degrees F and avoid back-to-back showers.
4. Use space heaters sparingly. Unplug them when you leave the room.

YOUTH PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

As part of our ongoing commitment to supporting youth, education and community involvement, we're proud to offer a variety of programs designed to inspire and empower young people.

Scholarship program

Access Energy Cooperative offers \$1,500 scholarships to high school seniors. Applications are accepted through March 15. The parent or guardian of the applicant must be a member of the cooperative and live at a property receiving service from the cooperative. Applications and details can be found on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



Scan the QR code for more information.

Youth Tour Trip, June 14-20

Access Energy Cooperative sponsors up to two students per year on an all-expenses-paid Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C.

Applications are accepted through Feb. 28. Students must be a sophomore or junior and attend a school in southeast Iowa in one of the 10 counties served by the cooperative, but are not required to be a member of the cooperative. A personal interview is required of each applicant on March 12 at our office to qualify. Applications and details can be found on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



Scan the QR code for more information.

Lineworker Scholarship program

Access Energy Cooperative offers \$2,000 scholarships to students enrolled, or planning to enroll, in a one- or two-year electric lineworker program.

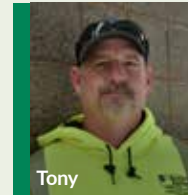
Applications are accepted through March 15. The applicant must reside in southeast Iowa in the general service area of the cooperative but is not required to be a member. Applications and details can be found on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



Scan the QR code for more information.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM

Access Energy Cooperative invites you to welcome two new employees to the cooperative team. We are happy to have Tony, journeyman lineman, and Payton, apprentice lineman, join our team of employees who are dedicated to serving our members.



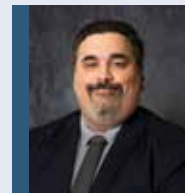
Tony



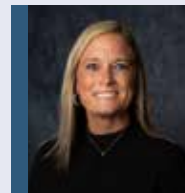
Payton

CONGRATULATIONS

Access Energy Cooperative recently celebrated four employees with a collective 95 years of service dedicated to serving our members. Thank you for all you do for the members of our cooperative!



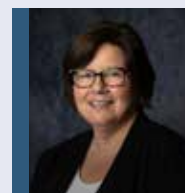
Ricardo
5 years



Courtney
20 years



Bill
30 years



Tammy
40 years



CHICKEN AND SAUSAGE JAMBALAYA

- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 pound kielbasa, any style
- 2 medium red, green or yellow bell peppers
- 2 medium yellow squash
- 2-3 tablespoons Creole or Cajun seasoning
- salt, to taste
- 2 14.5-ounce cans petite diced tomatoes
- 2 small onions, diced
- 1 pound shrimp, cooked, deveined and peeled
- cooked rice
- fresh parsley, chopped, optional

Cut chicken into bite-size pieces and slice kielbasa into half-inch pieces. Seed, core and cut bell peppers into two-inch strips. Cut squash into bite-size pieces. Grease slow cooker and place chicken and sausage in first. Sprinkle with Cajun seasoning and salt. Pour in diced tomatoes. Top with bell peppers, squash and onions. Cover and cook 7-8 hours on low, or 3-4 hours on high, until chicken is done. Add cooked shrimp and stir to mix. Cook 5-10 minutes longer on low. Spoon jambalaya into bowls of hot cooked rice. Sprinkle with parsley. *Serves 8, recipe can be cut in half to serve 4*

Jacque Bird • Sutherland
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

SHRIMP DIP

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese
- ½ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup cocktail sauce
- 2 4-ounce cans tiny shrimp, drained
- crackers

Mix the first three ingredients and spread on a platter. Spread cocktail sauce over top and sprinkle with shrimp. Serve with crackers. *Serves 10-15*

Laura DeSmet • Larchwood
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CAJUN BUTTER CHICKEN BREAST

- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 1½ teaspoons mild paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon chili powder, add more if you like heat
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cracked pepper, to taste
- 2 large chicken breasts
- 1½ tablespoons canola oil, divided
- 4 tablespoons butter, divided
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ½ cup low-sodium chicken stock broth
- rice

Combine the first nine ingredients to make a Cajun seasoning. Slice chicken horizontally in half to make four steaks. Toss chicken in seasoning mixture. Drizzle with ½ tablespoon oil and rub seasoning all over chicken to coat evenly. Heat remaining oil and 1 tablespoon butter in skillet or pan over medium-high heat until combined and hot. Sear chicken in batches for 5-7 minutes each side, until golden or internal temperature is 165 degrees F using a meat thermometer. Remove from pan and set aside to rest for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, reduce heat to medium and melt remaining butter in pan. Sauté garlic about 30 seconds, until fragrant, while scraping any browned bits from the pan. Pour in broth and let reduce for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and drizzle sauce over chicken. Serve warm with a side of rice. *Serves 4*

Bryce and Kelly Godbersen • Odebolt
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com
and search our online archive
of hundreds of recipes in
various categories.



CAJUN SHRIMP PASTA

- ½ cup butter
- 5-6 scallions, chopped
- ½ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- ½ head fresh garlic, smashed
- 1 quart heavy whipping cream
- ¼ cup spicy seasoning mix
- 2 pounds raw shrimp
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 pound package angel hair or linguini pasta, cooked

Melt butter on medium-high heat. Add scallions, parsley and garlic. Cook until melted, then turn heat to high and add heavy cream. Add your choice of spicy seasonings to taste (or add a mixture of Chef Paul Prudhomme Magic Seafood Seasonings or Blackened Redfish and Louisiana Cajun Blackened Seasoning). Then add shrimp and cook. Stir the entire time until shrimp are fully cooked. Cover and turn to low or turn heat off. It will thicken as it cools. Add Parmesan cheese and serve over cooked pasta. *Serves 10*

Russell Hornsby • Bouton
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

BANANAS FOSTER BREAD PUDDING

- 5-6 cups bread cubes
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups half and half
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- ¾ teaspoon cinnamon, divided
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- salt
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar
- 4 tablespoons pecans
- 2 tablespoons rum, optional
- 2-3 bananas, sliced

Place bread cubes in greased baking dish. Mix eggs, half and half, sugar, vanilla, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, nutmeg and a sprinkle of salt. Pour over bread. Bake at 350 degrees F for 35 minutes. In a saucepan, melt butter, brown sugar, pecans, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, a sprinkle of salt and rum, if desired. Heat over medium-high heat until bubbly. Add bananas and cook for 2-3 minutes. Serve bread pudding warm or at room temperature with warm bananas foster sauce. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

SPICY CAJUN PRETZELS

- 1 cup corn oil
- 1 1-ounce package ranch dressing
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried dill weed
- 1 16-ounce package mini pretzels

Combine oil and seasonings. Break pretzels into pieces and place pieces in roaster pan. Pour seasoned oil over top of pretzels and stir. Bake at 200 degrees F for 2 hours, stirring every 30 minutes. Remove from oven, drain on paper towel. Store until ready to serve. Makes a great party snack!

Tauhni Lang • Russel
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

CAJUN POTATO AND ANDOUILLE SAUSAGE

- 1 pound andouille sausage, sliced (or any sausage)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 medium potatoes, diced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup fresh green onions, chopped (for garnish)

In a large Dutch oven, add andouille sausage and cook until brown. Remove, drain on paper towel and set aside. Add onion and bell peppers to Dutch oven. Sauté until tender, then add garlic. Add potatoes to vegetables and pour in chicken broth. Stir to combine ingredients evenly. Add seasonings and stir well. Cook until potatoes are tender, then add sausage. Stir in heavy cream. Taste and adjust seasonings if necessary. An additional sprinkle of smoked paprika can be added for extra flavor. Garnish with green onions and serve hot. *Serves 6*

Tonya Crowl • Ashton
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

WANTED:

BACKYARD BBQ FAVORITES

THE REWARD:

\$25 BILL CREDIT FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Feb. 28

We're looking for delicious summer **backyard BBQ recipes** – think potato salads, sweet corn dishes, saucy BBQ ribs and beyond! Selected submission will appear in our June issue. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

MAIL: Recipes

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HOME LIGHTING 101

Lighting is something most of us don't think much about – until it's wrong. Maybe the living room is too dim for reading or the kitchen lights have an odd yellow glow. With a little planning, you can make your home brighter and more energy efficient.

Watts vs. lumens

When you're shopping for lightbulbs, it's easy to focus on watts, but watts only measure how much energy a bulb uses. When it comes to brightness, what really matters is the lumen count. Lumens measure the actual light output. For example, an 800-lumen bulb gives off about the same amount of light as an old-fashioned 60-watt incandescent bulb.

A helpful rule of thumb: higher lumens mean brighter light, and lower watts mean less energy consumed. Remember to check wattage ratings for fixtures and only install bulbs that meet the fixture's wattage safety requirements.








Color temperature and consistency

Light bulbs also vary in color temperature, which range from warm yellow to cool white or even bluish tones. This detail often gets overlooked, until you replace one bulb and notice the new light doesn't match the others. If mismatched tones drive you crazy, consider buying and installing bulbs of the same brand and wattage in a room at the same time.

Dimmers and switches

Installing dimmers instead of standard on and off switches can be a game changer. Dimmers give you more control over brightness, help save energy and create a more comfortable atmosphere. Not all bulbs are dimmable, so double check labels before buying.

While you're thinking about switches, consider whether you have enough of them – and in the right places. A light you can only turn off from one end of a hallway quickly becomes annoying. For new installations or upgrades, it's best to hire a licensed

<h1>Home Lighting Guide</h1>  <p><small>The following information outlines recommendations for home lighting, however, additional options for bulbs, fixtures and spaces in your home may be available. Sources: Home Depot, Alcon Lighting</small></p>			
Room/Area	Recommended Lumens	Fixture Types	Smart Tips
 Living Room	15-30 per sq. ft. 150 sq. ft. room 2,250 - 4,500 lumens	Ceiling fixtures, can lighting, lamps/ accent lighting	Use smart bulbs to adjust color temp and control remotely.
 Kitchen	30-40 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. room 3,000 - 4,000 lumens	Recessed ceiling lights or flush mounts	Smart switches can be used to control zones (dining vs. prep); undercabinet motion lights offer late-night illumination.
 Dining Room	10-20 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. room 1,000 - 2,000 lumens	Pendant or chandelier fixture	Smart, dimmable bulbs allow various levels of brightness for ambiance.
 Bedroom	10-20 per sq. ft. 120 sq. ft. room 1,200 - 2,400 lumens	Ceiling fixtures or recessed lighting	Motion sensors are great options for nighttime use.
 Bathroom	50-80 per sq. ft. 60 sq. ft. room 3,000 - 4,000 lumens	Over-vanity fixtures and/or recessed lighting	Cool LED bulbs provide brighter light for shaving, applying makeup, etc.
 Porch/ Home Entry	100-200 per sq. ft. 100 sq. ft. entry 10,000 - 20,000 lumens	Wall lanterns, ceiling mount and/or floodlights	Motion-activated flood lights and/or smart outdoor bulbs are energy efficient and boost home security.

electrician to ensure everything is wired safely and efficiently.

Fixtures

Bulbs are only part of the equation – fixtures matter too. Each type serves a purpose. Ambient lighting, like sconces or glass-covered ceiling fixtures, provides general illumination. Task lighting, like pendants, desk lamps or track lighting, focuses light where you need it most.

When choosing a fixture, think beyond looks. Ask yourself: does this light provide the right amount of brightness for the space? A chandelier might look good over the dining table but leave the rest of the room too dim. Alternatively, an oversized fixture could flood the room with more light than you need, wasting both energy and money.

Smart lighting: Energy efficiency meets convenience

Smart lighting adds another layer of control for illuminating your home, as well as convenience. With smart

bulbs, you can adjust brightness, set schedules or even change colors, all from your phone or a voice assistant like Alexa or Google Assistant.

Smart lighting also lets you personalize your space. You can go classic with warm white tones or experiment with colors. Smart bulbs still rely on power from your wall switch, which needs to stay in the "on" position for remote controls to work. If you prefer using a physical switch, consider pairing smart bulbs with a smart light switch. Many of today's smart switches also come with motion detectors, adding another level of efficiency and convenience.

Good lighting doesn't just make your home look better – it makes it feel better too. With a little planning, you can create spaces that are welcoming, functional and energy efficient. Whether you stick to traditional bulbs and fixtures or explore the flexibility of smart lighting, thoughtful choices today will brighten your home for years to come.

WIN A \$25 BILL CREDIT

Sign up for paperless billing by MARCH 15, 2026, to enter the drawing

To sign up for paperless billing, you must first have a SmartHub account. SmartHub is a web and mobile app that can be used to view and pay your bill. To create an account, visit our website at www.accessenergycoop.com or download the SmartHub app on your mobile device.

Once you sign up for paperless billing in SmartHub, you will be notified by email when your bill is available for viewing. This email will include the amount due and the due date. You can pay securely online or in the app, anytime, anywhere, as long as you have an internet connection.

We are happy to answer any questions you have. Call us at 866-242-4232. Or you can email our billing department at billing@accessenergycoop.com.

To sign up in SmartHub:

1. From the home screen, click on "Settings" on the left navigation.
2. Select "Paperless Billing" from the drop-down menu.
3. Turn on paperless billing by switching your account(s) on.

Members are not required to sign up for paperless billing to use SmartHub. All members signed up for paperless billing by March 15 are eligible for the drawing.

SAFETY POSTER CONTEST

Safety is a top priority for Access Energy Cooperative, and we are committed to safety awareness.

Safety Poster Contest - Win \$100!

Applicants or groups of any age can showcase their creativity in our Safety Poster Contest, promoting awareness of electrical safety in fun and engaging ways. Twelve winners will be chosen from the contest entries to win \$100.

Posters are accepted through March 31. Details can be found on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.

Scan the QR Code for more information.



GETTING STARTED WITH SMARTHUB IS EASY

Don't have a SmartHub account? Create one today.

Follow these simple steps:

1. Look up your account number
2. Go to our website: accessenergycoop.com
3. Click "Access Account Online" in the banner at the top
4. Find "New User?" and click the link to enroll



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SmartHub on the GO!

The app is also available from the Apple App Store and Google Play. Simply use the camera on your smart device to scan the QR code below or search for SmartHub (by National Information Solutions Cooperative).



SUPPLY CHAIN KINKS STILL CHALLENGE MISSION FOR AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE SERVICE

BY CATHY CASH

Kinks in the supply chain caused by the COVID pandemic may be in the rearview for regular consumers, but new bottlenecks in the flow of goods and services are challenging electric cooperatives to deliver affordable and reliable service. And the circumstances squeezing the supply chains for electric co-ops are unlikely to ease in the foreseeable future.

Basically, we're talking about a higher demand for electricity, but the supply of equipment needed to maintain or build more power plants has not kept up. Then there's a skilled labor shortage to get the job done and tariffs on imported materials. All these things add up to delayed energy projects at increased costs.

Rising demand collides with limited supply

With all things digital from phones to thermostats, electricity use is up. To sustain the growing digital economy, large data centers with appetites for electricity akin to that of a small city are sprouting up across rural America and electric co-ops' service territories. These centers soak up extreme amounts of power to serve the internet's relentless demand for high-speed networking, data storage and artificial intelligence.

But even in this post-pandemic world, there remains a scarcity of materials, equipment and workers to get new power generation sources built to meet this growing demand.

After the pandemic forced manufacturing to shutter for months in 2020, a lot of experienced employees retired or never even went back to their jobs making transformers and other equipment essential to distributing electricity to consumers. The supply of



The shrunken labor force is challenging the supply for new power plant construction, maintenance or outage recovery. Photo Source: ERMCO



Electric co-ops are seeing lag times of up to four years between orders and delivery of transformers at double the prices compared to pre-pandemic times. Photo Source: ERMCO

some transformers has never been fully replenished, and the lack of a skilled workforce today makes it a constant game of catch-up.

Delays and rising costs ripple through projects

U.S.-based engineering, procurement and construction firms are scrambling to meet work orders for new power projects as there is more demand today than they can keep up with, said Stephanie Crawford, regulatory affairs director at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

As a result, equipment crucial for electricity projects – from new substations to power plant maintenance and outage repairs after storms hit – are on delay and coming in at much higher prices.

Co-ops are seeing lag times of up to four years between an order for a transformer and its ultimate delivery. Prices are up 70% to 100% compared to 2020. Lead times for new gas turbines for a power plant can range from three to six years and cost 25% more than just three years ago.

According to one industry insider, an electric co-op that spent \$10 million on materials and equipment for electricity projects and maintenance in 2020 had to spend more than \$15.5 million in 2025 to keep up.

Collaboration offers a path forward

So, what is your electric co-op doing to maintain reliable and affordable service?

Collaboration, which is baked into every co-op's DNA, is key. Co-ops are working with equipment suppliers and contractors closer than ever before. Many are planning their orders at least a year in advance of construction to work out the snags of the current supply chain.

Knowing their exact inventory and the physical storage space also helps co-ops keep necessary equipment on hand, materials flowing and projects as near to schedule as possible.

The biggest challenge right now is "navigating uncertainty," said Tim Mills, president and CEO of ERMCO, a subsidiary of Little Rock-based Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, which makes distribution transformers with American-made steel at its facilities in Tennessee and Georgia.

By working as a team, electric co-ops, manufacturers and their industry partners will be able to improve forecasting equipment needs, stay ahead of potential demand changes and experience a smoother supply chain.

Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

CONNECTED HOMES: THE POWER OF WHAT'S PLUGGED IN

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Our homes are changing, and so is the electric grid. Across the country, more households are becoming “smart” and connected. From thermostats that adjust automatically to electric vehicles (EV) that charge overnight, the devices we plug in are becoming intelligent, flexible and increasingly central to how we use and even produce electricity.

For your electric cooperative, this growing network of connected devices creates new ways for co-ops and their members to work together to keep power reliable and affordable.

What is a connected home?

A connected home is one where everyday appliances and devices can communicate with each other, you or even with your electric co-op. These could include thermostats that adjust to your patterns and preferences, water heaters that operate when electricity is cheaper, home batteries that store solar-generated power for later use or air-source heat pumps that efficiently heat and cool your home.

Each of these tools can help you use energy more efficiently. And when managed effectively, or when many homes coordinate and balance their energy use together, they can also help your co-op keep power flowing reliably and affordably for the entire community.

The power you don't see

You might have heard the phrase “behind the meter.” This simply refers to energy equipment that operates on your side of the electric meter that you own or control. This could include solar panels, battery storage systems or connected devices like EV chargers or smart thermostats.

Individually, they may seem small, but together they can make a big difference. If hundreds of water



Behind the meter refers to equipment that operates on your side of the electric meter that you own or control. Photo Credit: LG

heaters slightly delay heating during a peak time of day (when electricity use is high), the co-op can avoid purchasing power at a higher cost, which essentially keeps rates lower for members. If home batteries store solar-generated energy during the day and release it back to the grid at night, it helps balance the overall supply and demand of electricity.

How connected devices help the grid

Each day, our electric grid must maintain a perfect balance to match the amount of electricity generated with the amount of electricity we are using – all in real time. Because electricity can't easily be stored at scale, this balancing act is constant and complex.

Connected devices give electric co-ops powerful new tools to help manage this complexity. Traditionally, electricity use was simple: flip a switch and power flows instantly. But today, many devices can shift when and how they use energy, also known as load



Connected devices, such as smart thermostats, can help you use energy more efficiently. Photo Credit: LG

flexibility. Load flexibility allows you and your co-op to better align energy use during times when electricity is more affordable, without sacrificing comfort or convenience.

The cooperative advantage

Electric co-ops are led by the members they serve. That means co-ops can design connected home programs that work for your community, not Wall Street. Members who participate can often earn bill credits or incentives, and every member benefits from lower peak costs and improved reliability.

Together, we can build a grid that's smarter, more flexible and ready for the future that's powered by what's plugged in. Contact your local electric co-op or visit their website to learn more about programs for connected devices and additional ways you can save energy (and money!).

Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

SHOULD I UPGRADE MY APPLIANCE?

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Buying a new appliance can feel daunting. Before you hand over your hard-earned money, choose an appliance that will help you save money over time.

When shopping, keep in mind that not all new appliances are high efficiency and not all old appliances are inefficient. The less efficient your current appliance is, the more you will save with an upgrade. The yellow EnergyGuide label on new appliances shows the yearly energy cost, kilowatt-hour electricity use and ENERGY STAR® logo, if certified.

Refrigerators: When an upgrade pays off

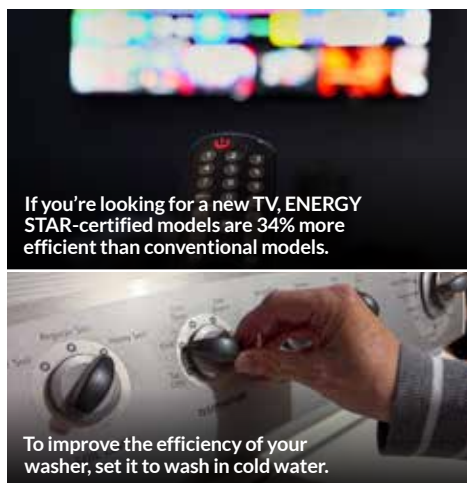
Refrigerators have seen major efficiency improvements over the years. New refrigerators use up to 73% less energy than 1970s models and about one-third less than 20-year-old models.

On a visit to my mom's house, she proudly showed off her 1980s refrigerator she bought when her 1970s harvest gold model died. If her 80s fridge uses 2,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year, at 14 cents per kWh, it costs \$280 per year to operate. New ENERGY STAR-certified refrigerator prices start at \$500 with yearly energy costs ranging from \$38 to \$122. If mom buys a new ENERGY STAR-certified refrigerator for \$1,000 with \$100 yearly energy cost – saving her \$180 per year – it will pay for itself in about 5½ years.

If you intend to keep your existing appliance, be sure to weigh the additional energy costs. Maximize efficiency and keep your food safe by setting your refrigerator to 37 degrees F and your freezer at 0 degrees F.

Laundry appliances: Efficiency gains aren't always equal

New ENERGY STAR-certified clothes washers and dryers are also more efficient than older models. Use the ENERGY STAR Product



Finder at www.energystar.gov to compare products. Integrated Modified Energy Factor measures the washer's energy efficiency. A higher number is better. Integrated Water Factor measures water efficiency. A lower number is better.

I recently bought a new washing machine when my old front-load machine died. I was considering a top-load machine. When I compared ENERGY STAR-certified top loaders to front loaders, I changed my mind. ENERGY STAR-certified front loaders use about 50% less energy and water than top-load agitator washers and about 25% less energy and water than top-load impeller washers that don't have an agitator.

My new washer cost \$698. According to the appliance's EnergyGuide, based on six loads of laundry a week and an electricity cost of 14 cents per kWh, the yearly energy cost is \$15. Similar non-ENERGY STAR-certified models were \$48 per year. Mine didn't cost much more than non-ENERGY STAR models and will help me save over time.

Then I had to make the decision about buying the matching dryer. My dryer was functional but had features I didn't like. At 14 cents per kWh and running roughly six loads a week for an hour each, my old dryer used \$131.04 per year.



The new matching ENERGY STAR-certified dryer cost \$698 and estimates annual energy use at 607 kWh, which is \$84.98 per year at 14 cents per kWh. With an estimated savings of \$46 per year, the dryer would take 15 years for the savings to cover the price. That's a long time and not worth the cost.

To improve your washer and dryer efficiency, wash in cold water, don't over dry clothes and clean your lint trap between every load.

Televisions: Settings may make a difference

Just like the light bulbs in your home, LED televisions offer increased efficiency. ENERGY STAR-certified televisions are 34% more efficient than conventional models. If you have a working LED television, swapping to an ENERGY STAR model is more efficient but may not make up for the cost of a new TV. Instead, check the efficiency settings on your TV or buy a smart power strip that turns off other connected devices when not in use.

Whatever appliance you are upgrading or replacing, make an informed decision by comparing the cost of operation and shopping ENERGY STAR models to help lower your electric bill.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

LOVING THE LAND

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

February is the month of love, with Valentine's Day and all the flowers, candy and cards that come with it. I wasn't thinking about valentines, though, last December during the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) Annual Meeting in West Des Moines.

Instead, I started thinking about a love of the land in this unlikely setting, thanks to Red Steagall. Late that Thursday afternoon, Steagall, 87, and The Boys in the Bunkhouse sang songs of the West, celebrating the American spirit. You could tell that Steagall's connections to rural America have remained as strong as his boyhood memories of Texas Panhandle cowboys.

An award-winning songwriter, recording artist, radio host, TV personality and official cowboy poet of Texas, Steagall also has ties to northwest Iowa. As he shared stories that inspired his poems like "The Fence That Me and Shorty Built," Steagall recalled the five summers he spent working on his uncle's farm near Havelock in Pocahontas County. From Texas to Iowa, Steagall's sentiments reflect a love of the land:

"You don't own the land;
the land owns you."

"We must care for the land
while we're here and pass it
on to future generations."

"I sincerely believe in the ownership
of land in the progress of a
free, independent society."

Who talks like this anymore?

It's rare to hear unabashed,
heartfelt sentiments about land
ownership and the essence of
American liberty. I was hooked.

America's story: a history of the land

This brought back memories of
growing up on my family's farm
northwest of Lake City, where my dad



Red Steagall celebrates the American spirit as a well-known cowboy poet.

told me that all original wealth comes from the land. I also recall reading "Gone with the Wind" and thinking about my Irish ancestors who came to Calhoun County in 1889 to farm.

"To anyone with a drop of Irish blood in them – why, the land they live on is like their mother," Gerald O'Hara emphasized to his daughter Scarlett during one poignant scene. "It will come to you, this love of the land. There's no gettin' away from it if you're Irish."

Previous generations intimately understood the inherent value of land. Native Americans' views of land centered on deep spiritual connections, stewardship and communal use – all essential to their identity, culture and survival.

Pioneer settlers often risked everything to acquire land. Western settlement exploded after Congress passed the Homestead Act in 1862. This offered up to 160 acres of public land for a nominal fee to anyone who was willing to claim, settle and farm the land for at least five years.

More than 50% of homesteaders successfully "proved up" and achieved their dream of land ownership. The Homestead Act gave away 10% of U.S. land (270 million acres).



By 2007, there were an estimated 93 million homesteader descendants alive, according to the National Park Service.

"We are born to this land"

Despite this heritage, it seems like land isn't top of mind for most people anymore, probably because we've become such an urbanized society. Even in a farm state like Iowa, 63.2% of us live in urban areas. (A community must have a population of at least 5,000 to qualify as an urban area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.)

Still, there's something about land that touches something deep inside us. Throughout American history, there have been various "back to the land" movements. Then there's the current homesteading movement and the freedom to pursue a simpler, more sustainable life.

"My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty." Or, in the words of the iconic Steagall: "We are born to this land. We call her America. We love her. We are the luckiest people on this earth."

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.



Watch Red Steagall's
performance from the
Iowa Association of
Electric Cooperatives'
Annual Meeting.



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