

● SEPTEMBER 2026



# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



Access Energy Cooperative  
2026 Annual Meeting recap

Plug-in solar:  
What you need to know

Chicken dinner recipes

Win \$100 in the 2027 Photo Contest ▶ See Page 14

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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Tefna Greiner, an Access Energy Cooperative member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!

# CORE VALUES DRIVE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP AT THE STATEWIDE LEVEL

BY JIM MILLER



Last month, I traveled across the state with the leadership team of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) for our

district meetings with member cooperatives. During our visits, we talked about our foundational values and how they impact everything we do for Iowa's electric cooperatives and the member-consumers they serve.

An organization's mission should define what it does and why it exists. IAEC's mission is to serve, support and advocate for our members by providing expertise and collaborative leadership.

## Living our core values

Our core values are the fundamental beliefs and guiding principles that dictate IAEC's culture and standards for employees and board directors:

- **Integrity:** We build relationships based on trust and honesty.
- **Leadership:** We work as a unified team and lead by example.
- **Excellence:** Our work is performed with excellence and empowered through innovation.
- **Service:** We support our members with superior service in a timely manner.

When we talk about these statements and internalize them, it helps IAEC employees and board members make consistent and strategic decisions.

This column is my farewell message, as my term as a board director at Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association expires later this month. I have had the incredible privilege of serving my local cooperative as a director for 18 years, and I

often reflect on a quote that is written on the boardroom wall:

*Every decision I make shall be based on what is best for the member-owners of this cooperative.*

This quote is why I always prepared diligently for my local and state board meetings so I could make the most informed decisions.

## A heartfelt thank you

As my term on the local co-op board comes to an end, so too does my service on the statewide board. I have truly enjoyed serving on the IAEC board for almost five years and as your statewide board president for the past two years.

I commend the outstanding staff at IAEC for their professionalism and expertise. I see IAEC's core values of integrity, leadership, excellence and service at work every time I come to the statewide office.

As I step back from electric cooperative service, I must

acknowledge my fellow statewide board directors. They greeted me with camaraderie and friendship from the very beginning, and our rapport has continued to grow. The IAEC boardroom is centered on mutual respect and trust because we focus on what unites us.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Rae. She has been so supportive of my electric cooperative service for 18 years, and I could not have accomplished this work without her.

While my leadership comes to an end, I am excited for what the future holds for electric cooperatives in Iowa. Please know that you are well represented on the IAEC board by a team of directors and employees who embody statewide core values and cooperative values every day. It has been my honor to serve my fellow co-op members in this capacity.

*Jim Miller is the board president for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, whose term ends this month.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A 13-QUART AIR FRYER OVEN

Meet your ultimate cooking companion! The Cosori air fryer oven features 11 functions packed into a stainless-steel housing with a 13-quart capacity. This versatile oven is designed to make cooking a breeze with 50 chef-made recipes included to inspire your culinary creations. From baking to roasting, this is one oven to rule them all. The large capacity is perfect for cooking for a crowd or meal-prepping for the week.

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Sept. 30. 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 Bose portable speaker from the July issue was **Evelyn Beavers**, a **T.I.P. REC** member-consumer.



**ENTER ONLINE BY SEPT. 30!**

# UPCOMING EVENTS

|          |                             |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| SEPT. 7  | Office closed for Labor Day |
| SEPT. 17 | Board meeting               |
| OCT. 12  | Board meeting               |

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.*

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## BALANCING DATA CENTER DEMAND AND RELIABILITY

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Data centers may feel like a big-city phenomenon, but more of them are showing up in rural communities – and there's good reason for that. Rural

areas offer what data centers need most: affordable land, room to grow and access to transmission lines that can move large amounts of power.

What makes data centers different from other large businesses is their enormous appetite for electricity. These facilities run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Servers must stay online constantly, which means power must be reliable every minute of every day.

For electric cooperatives like Access Energy Cooperative, powering data centers creates both opportunities and challenges.

### Strengthening the electric grid

On the plus side, data centers have the potential to bring steady, long-term load growth that helps support investments in the local grid. With proper planning and policy support, these upgrades – including new substations, stronger lines and smarter technology – could benefit all Access Energy Cooperative members and help keep electricity rates steady.

Providing power to data centers presents challenges, too. These large facilities can be constructed and begin operating in as little as one year, but ensuring the necessary infrastructure, equipment and electricity requires longer lead times

and significant financial investment. Strategic planning and partnerships, as well as long-term power supply strategies, are essential to the process.

### Planning for the future

While Access Energy Cooperative does not currently serve any data centers, co-ops nationwide are fielding requests and inquiries from tech companies, and we anticipate similar requests in the not-too-distant future.

As a member-owned cooperative, our responsibility is twofold: to provide reliable, affordable electric service to all Access Energy Cooperative members, and to listen to the communities we serve. Balancing these responsibilities is not always simple, especially as new types of large-scale energy users, like data centers, become part of the local landscape.

No matter what the future holds, our priority will be supporting growth with fairness – that means ensuring large-scale energy users pay their fair share so residential bills don't spike and our local communities feel invested in.

The energy landscape is changing, and with it comes both opportunities and challenges. My commitment, and the commitment of Access Energy Cooperative's board and employees, is to continue listening, communicating, and working with our members and community partners to ensure all decisions reflect the best interests of the people we serve.

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

## Big Data, Bigger Demands

Many companies are choosing rural areas for their data centers because of cheaper land, available power and potential tax breaks. Data centers require huge amounts of electricity to operate, which presents new opportunities and challenges for electric co-ops.

- HVAC:** Constant cooling is needed to ensure the servers function properly.
- Servers:** Servers run applications and process data 24/7. One server rack can consume enough electricity to power a small home. A large data center can house thousands of server racks.
- Infrastructure:** Data centers often require new electrical infrastructure to meet their power needs.
- Water Source:** Many large data centers are deploying evaporative cooling, which is more efficient than compressor-based systems.
- Backup Power:** On-site generators keep data centers running during power outages and can also be used to help lower demand when electricity use spikes.



## POWERING THE FUTURE



As data centers and other large-scale energy users look to locate in the Midwest, Associated Electric Cooperative (Associated), alongside its six G&T cooperative-owners and the 51 distribution cooperatives they serve, have taken a proactive approach to ensure any new major power demands can be served reliably and fairly. Associated has historically served member load as it developed across the system; however, the concentrated and rapidly growing demand from data centers and other large loads presents new operational and financial challenges. The new Large Load Program safeguards system stability and protects members, while preparing the three-tier cooperative system for future load growth.

TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS ON  
ASSOCIATED ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE'S LARGE  
LOAD PROGRAM**1 Why a Large Load Program exists**

Rapid growth in data centers, AI facilities, and other large power users is creating new challenges for electric systems across the country. Associated and its members developed a Large Load Program to ensure any new major power demands can be served reliably, fairly and without negative impacts on existing members.

The program helps manage timing, scale and fair rates for potential new large loads, while maintaining system reliability and equity among all members.

**2 Who it applies to**

The program applies to any new member load requiring more than 50 megawatts (MW) of capacity – generally large industrial or data center-type projects. These requests must go through a structured review process before being served.

**3 How the process works**

Before committing resources, Associated and the G&T cooperative-owner require detailed transmission and capacity studies to evaluate if the system can reliably serve the new demand and what system upgrades will cost the developer. Both a screening study and facilities study are paid for by the project developer upfront, and each project undergoes a credit

review that requires confidentiality agreements (NDAs) among all parties.

**4 Protecting co-op members**

The goal is simple: no added risk or cost to existing co-op members. Before entering into any agreement, prospective large load member-consumers must:

- Pay the full cost of any transmission upgrades necessary to serve the load;
- Provide an upfront payment to ensure financial security and safeguard co-op members' interests; and
- Agree to rates that reflect their cost to serve and protect co-op members from potential risk.

This approach ensures fairness and keeps system investments sustainable.

**5 Planning ahead for growth**

The Associated system is not currently serving any large data centers. The cooperative is building new generation projects – two simple-cycle natural gas peaking plants in Oklahoma and Missouri – solely to meet existing member load growth and strengthen system reliability, particularly during winter peaks.

Resource planning analysis of recent load growth trends have identified the potential need for future energy capacity as early as 2029, which would support the future of member energy needs while responsibly preparing for any large-load opportunities that may arise.

HELP OTHERS  
BY CONTRIBUTING  
TO RECare

RECare is a voluntary energy assistance program that offers funds to local families who need assistance with their electric bills. Your contribution can help one of these local families!

You may make a one-time contribution or a monthly pledge. Monthly pledges can be a fixed amount or you may have your bill rounded up to the nearest dollar to donate the difference. Any contribution will help others, and it's easy to give! Simply write your contribution on your payment stub and include it with your payment or contact us if you would like to have contributions set up as part of your monthly bill. The program is administered by the Iowa Community Action Program, and recipients must meet their guidelines.

**You can use SmartHub to have a monthly amount included on your electric bill:**

1. Log in to your SmartHub account. Go to the Bill & Pay dropdown on the left. Select RECare, and follow instructions; or

2. Use the form below and mail to:

**RECare**  
c/o Access Energy Cooperative  
P.O. Box 440  
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641

Or, include the form below with your payment.

RECare Consumer  
Authorization Form

I would like to make a (check one):

- ☐ One-time contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Monthly contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(That will be added to my bill)
- ☐ Set up automatic round up of my bill

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

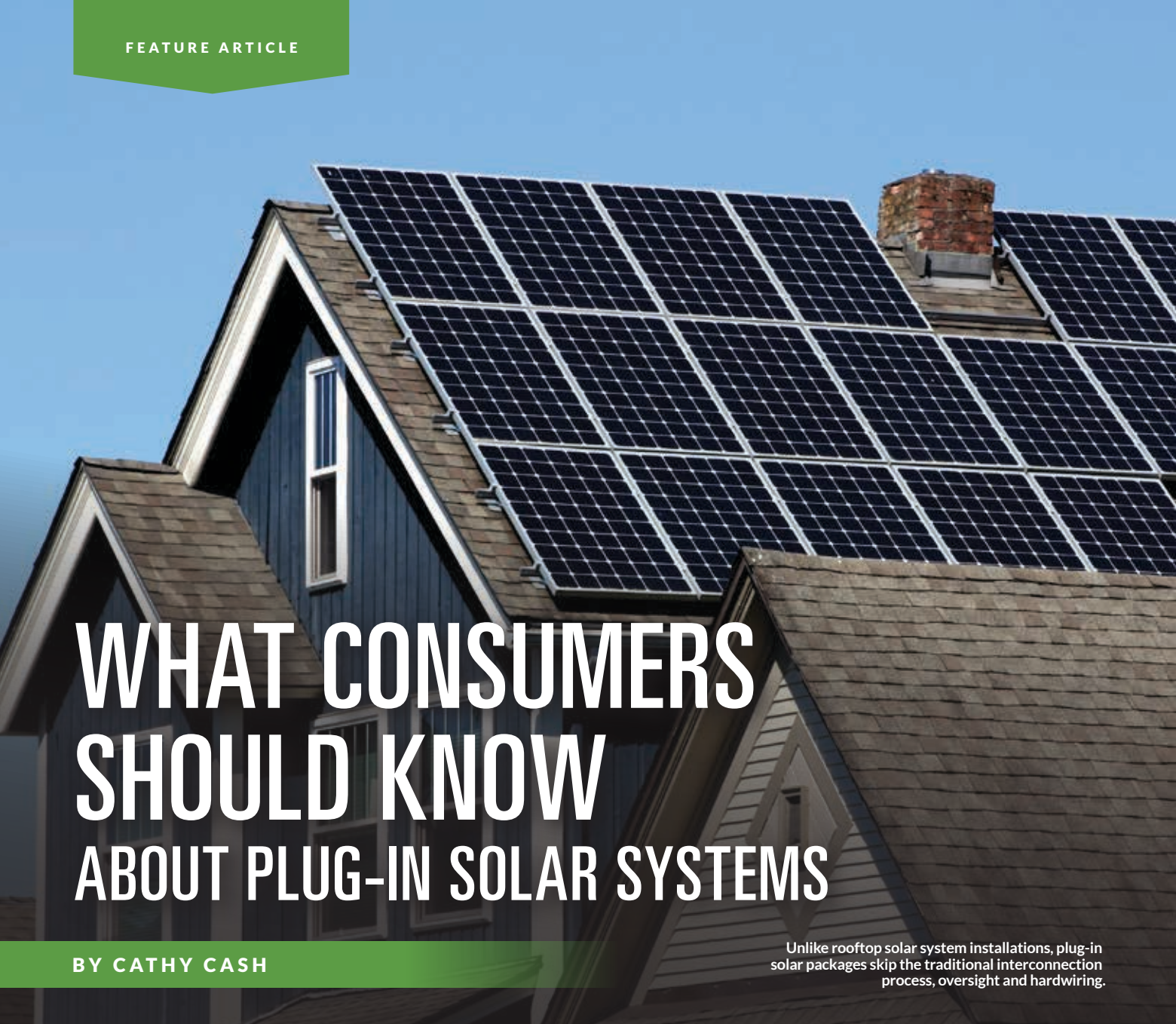
City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Account # (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

A large array of solar panels is installed on a residential roof. The panels are dark and rectangular, arranged in a grid pattern. The roof is made of brown shingles. A brick chimney is visible on the right side of the roof. The house has blue siding and a white window frame. The sky is clear and blue.

# WHAT CONSUMERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PLUG-IN SOLAR SYSTEMS

BY CATHY CASH

Unlike rooftop solar system installations, plug-in solar packages skip the traditional interconnection process, oversight and hardwiring.

It seems easy enough. You set up a solar panel or two and its small generator-type device outside, plug the thing into a wall socket in your house, and before you know it, electricity is flowing and lowering your power bill.

These portable, DIY solar energy systems can generate several hundred watts and are marketed like appliances that only require a regular outlet. But as plug-in solar becomes more popular, consumers should be aware that these products require important safety considerations.

So, what should you know about behind-the-meter, plug-in solar kits?

## Safety comes first

First, these systems have the potential to put lives and property at risk. Electric utility leaders note that almost all of these devices lack U.S. safety requirements, such as certification under UL codes or standards. UL has only recently developed a safety certification for plug-in solar systems.

Unlike rooftop solar and electric vehicle charger installations, these plug-and-play packages attempt to bypass existing interconnection protocols, oversight and inspections.

If a home's wiring is not up to snuff to support plug-in solar, the consumer

wouldn't know because they didn't call a licensed electrician to install the equipment or an inspector who could spot that hazard.

That can be dangerous on multiple fronts, leading to overheated wires in a residence, property damage, fire and even worse, serious or deadly electrical shock.

"Plug-in solar introduces real safety risks at the consumer-member level," said Jeffrey Groenewold, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) senior energy solutions manager. "Existing residential wiring standards were not designed for generation through standard outlets,

so plug-in solar increases the potential for fire and shock hazards.”

A charged solar system can backfeed, or send electricity back to the grid, and re-energize power lines without your electric cooperative’s knowledge. This could be fatal for lineworkers.

“The evolving plug-in solar industry must work to ensure these systems are properly managed and controlled to prevent unintended backfeed,” said Groenewold. “This is critical to protecting cooperative lineworkers and keeping them safe when they are out working to restore power.”

Unplugging the system does not eliminate its risk. Contact with the power cord energized by the solar panels can cause devastating injury.

Will Morris, a consultant to NRECA Business and Technology Strategies Group, underscored that these systems are not harmless appliances and should not be treated as such, especially around children.

“When we were growing up, our parents taught us if you would just unplug a blender or an iron or something like that, you’re putting that device in a safe state. With this, it is the complete opposite,” he said. “If somebody has this on their patio plugged into an exterior outlet and they unplug it and drop it in a puddle ... you can get 800 watts going to you. That can be a real bad day.”

### **Weighing the costs and benefits**

Then there’s the affordability factor. Is plug-in solar really a good deal?

The equipment for this behind-the-meter energy resource can cost a few hundred dollars to more than \$1,000, but its output, even in areas with plenty of sunshine, will shave only an estimated 40 to 80 cents per day off your power bill, according to industry experts.

“I would be very surprised if in our markets plug-in solar makes financial sense because the average cooperative consumer rates are pretty low,” said Morris. “It would take a long time to recover that investment.”

European apartment dwellers who face very high electricity rates have been eagerly buying “balcony solar” for a while and expect to pay off their investment in a couple of years, he said.

In Germany, where rates are particularly high, the plug-and-play packages are designed within the country’s safety mandates and must be registered with the grid operator.

“So, the German utility knows when that device is being utilized and that they have potential for energy to flow back into the grid,” he said.

But in the U.S., states are at various stages of potentially regulating plug-in solar to ensure safety.

“We’re at the Wild West phase of it right now,” Morris said. “You can buy a system and plug it in. It’s like buying a hairdryer, except the hairdryer is UL certified.”

Members are encouraged to contact their electric cooperative for knowledgeable advice on plug-in solar and to inquire about requirements for installing such a device.

“The bottom line is if you’re looking to lower your electric bill with some behind-the-meter device, please let your electric cooperative know,” said Groenewold. “Co-ops have a variety of programs to partner with you to save money and to do it safely.”

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





## LEMON CREAM CHICKEN

- 2½ pounds chicken thighs, boneless and skinless
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- parsley, to taste
- paprika, to taste
- creole seasoning, to taste
- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- ½ lemon, juiced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup cream
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese

Place chicken in a greased baking dish. Sprinkle liberally with seasonings. Mix butter, lemon juice, garlic and cream. Spread over chicken. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake at 375 degrees F for 45 minutes, or internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Serves 4

Laura DeSmet • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## ELEGANT CHICKEN

- 4 chicken breasts
- 8 bacon slices
- 4 ounces chipped beef
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- ½ teaspoon paprika

Wrap chicken in bacon. Cover bottom of 8x12-inch dish with chipped beef. Place chicken on top. Mix sour cream and soup, then pour over chicken. Sprinkle on paprika. Bake at 275 degrees F for 3 hours. Serves 4

Karen Bruns • Fonda  
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

## YUM CHICKEN CASSEROLE

- 6 chicken breasts
- 6 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 package Stove Top dressing
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- ½ can water
- ½ can milk

Place chicken in a 9x13-inch pan. Layer cheese on top of chicken. Mix dressing, soup, water and milk. Spread mixture over cheese. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Let sit 5 minutes before serving. Serves 6

Jane Person • Batavia  
Access Energy Cooperative

## CRANBERRY ORANGE CHICKEN BREAST

- 4-6 chicken breasts, boneless and skinless
- 1 cup bread or cracker crumbs
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese
- ¼ teaspoon garlic salt
- milk, for dipping
- oil
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons corn starch
- ½ cup cranberries, fresh or frozen
- ½ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup water

Flatten chicken breasts. Mix crumbs, cheese and garlic salt. Dip chicken in milk, then crumb mixture. Brown in oil, then place in 12x8-inch baking dish. Mix sugar, corn starch, cranberries, orange juice and water. Bring to boil, then pour over chicken. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes. Serves 4-6

Sandra Lacey • Danbury  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## STICKY CHICKEN RICE

- 2 cups uncooked rice
- 3 chicken breasts
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- olive oil
- ½ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- garlic, minced, to taste
- dash of sriracha
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons corn starch or arrowroot powder
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 12-ounce bag frozen green beans or broccoli
- Garnish: avocado, sesame seeds

Wash and drain rice, cook according to package instructions. Meanwhile, cut chicken into strips or chunks. Season with paprika, chili powder, onion powder, garlic powder, oregano, salt and pepper. Cook chicken and seasonings in olive oil. Once chicken is cooked, add soy sauce, honey, rice vinegar, sesame oil, minced garlic, sriracha and ginger. Coat the chicken with sauce mixture. In a small bowl, stir together corn starch or arrowroot powder and water. Stir until the sauce thickens slightly, then add to pan. Add frozen green beans or preferred vegetables. Cover and continue cooking until vegetables are done. Plate the sticky chicken over cooked rice and garnish with avocados and sesame seeds.  
*Serves 4-6*

MacKenzi Harger • Nevada  
Consumers Energy

## CHICKEN CORDON BLEU SOUP

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 small head cauliflower, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups chicken, cooked and shredded
- 2 cups half and half
- 1 cup ham, finely cubed
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups Swiss cheese, shredded

Heat butter and oil in pan. Add cauliflower and cook 8-10 minutes, until crisp tender. Add garlic and onion, cook for 1 minute. Stir in flour, then whisk in broth. Bring to a boil and cook until cauliflower, onions and garlic are tender. Cool and then puree in blender. Return to pan and stir in chicken, half and half, ham, mustard, salt and pepper. Heat through. Add cheese and stir until melted.  
*Serves 6-8*

Joyce James • Prescott  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## SPICY CHICKEN TAGINE

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 pat butter
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1½-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 2 red chilies, seeded and chopped
- 3 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 1-2 cinnamon sticks
- 8 chicken thighs
- 6 ounces dried apricots
- 2 tablespoons clear honey
- 1 14-ounce can plum tomatoes, with juice
- water, as needed
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped
- rice or couscous, optional

Heat oil and butter in medium-hot cast iron skillet or iron pot. Add onion, ginger and chilies until soft. Add rosemary sprigs and cinnamon sticks. Add chicken and brown on both sides. Add apricots and honey, then stir in tomatoes with juice. Add water, if needed to cover skillet bottom and apricots. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer gently for 35-40 minutes. Season with salt, pepper and basil, stir. Serve over cooked rice or couscous. *Serves 4*

George M. Clifford • Farmington  
Access Energy Cooperative

## WANTED:

## MEATLESS MEALS

### THE REWARD:

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

**Deadline is Sept. 30**

To ring in the new year, we want to share your favorite wintertime **meatless meals!** From sheet pans and casseroles to soups and savory salads, send us your favorite vegetarian meals for a chance to be featured in our January issue. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

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

**MAIL: Recipes**

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine  
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# ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE CELEBRATES SUCCESSFUL 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

Access Energy Cooperative members gathered on Aug. 4 at McMillan Park in Mount Pleasant for an evening of food, entertainment, fellowship and cooperative business during the cooperative's 2026 Annual Meeting. General Manager/CEO Kevin Wheeler thanked members for their continued support and emphasized the cooperative's commitment to meeting their needs.

At Access Energy Cooperative, we exist simply to provide for our members' needs. It is people who make the difference, the cooperative difference, for safe, reliable, efficient service.

Jake McVey provided entertainment throughout the evening. Mount Pleasant Hy-Vee served a meal accompanied by homemade ice cream from Hinterland Dairy in Donnellson. Kids enjoyed inflatable activities from Fields of Fun, pony rides by Windy Acres and Drive-a-Tractor with Joel Proennecke.

Henry County Public Health, Impact for Life and the Henry County Sheriff's Office shared information and visited with members. Associated Electric Cooperative Inc. (Associated) and Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative (Northeast Power), the cooperative's generation and transmission cooperatives, also provided energy and cooperative information.

"Access Energy Cooperative thoroughly and sincerely appreciates the assistance and participation of every individual and organization that helped make this event happen for our members, including those working behind the scenes such as Quality Equipment, Mount Pleasant VFW, Staats, Midwest Old Threshers, the City of Mount Pleasant,

Lance Refuse, Yotty's Golf Carts, Printgroup, employee family members and former employees, Northeast Power, Tri-County Electric and Associated employees," said Kimberly Davis, director of member services and public relations.

## Members conducted cooperative business

During the business meeting, members heard from special speakers, including Hannah Scott, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and Doug Aelts, Northeast Power. Reports from the cooperative officers, general manager and Youth Tour representative were presented, and election results were announced by the cooperative's attorney.

David Hollingsworth was elected to represent District 1, Mitch Yaley was elected to represent District 2 and Michael Holtkamp was elected to represent District 3. Each will serve a three-year term.

**Prize drawings were held throughout the evening, including the grand prize of a \$250 bill credit, which was won by member Jerry Ruschill. Dividend checks totaling \$1,087,407 were available for members to pick up at the meeting. Checks for members who were unable to attend were mailed in August.**

Following the Annual Meeting, the board of directors held its annual reorganization meeting and elected officers. David Hollingsworth was elected president, Michael Holtkamp, vice president; Virgil Symmonds, secretary; and William Benjamin, treasurer.



## 2026 ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE SAFETY POSTER CONTEST WINNERS

As promised, we are featuring the winning posters in the safety poster contest in this magazine as they will appear in the 2027 Access Energy Cooperative calendar. Calendars can be picked up at our office. This month's featured winners include:



**July 2027**

Cindy Searcy | Fairfield  
Be aware of your surroundings!

**June 2027**

Hayden Fey | New London  
Pools should be put up away from power lines.



**August 2027**

Case Buch | Batavia  
Electrical Safety

## TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Your smart thermostat, security camera, video doorbell and other connected devices make life more convenient – but they can also be targets for cybercriminals if they're not properly secured. Change default usernames and passwords, use strong, unique passwords for each device and enable multi-factor authentication when available. Keep your devices up to date by installing software and firmware updates, which often include important security fixes. Secure your home Wi-Fi network with a strong password and modern encryption. A few simple steps can help keep your personal information and smart devices safe from scammers.

Source: CISA



## THANK YOU FOR SUMMER HELP

Access Energy Cooperative appreciates the dedication and hard work of our summer help employees in the operations department this year: Mylan Lowenberg and Carter Adams.

Good luck with your education plans this fall!



# UNDERSTANDING EV TRENDS

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Electric vehicles (EVs) have undergone a notable shift over the past year. New policies, changing consumer demand and decisions by automakers are shaping the current EV market and what may come next.

## The market adjusts

One major turning point came with the expiration of the \$7,500 federal EV tax credit in September 2025. The effect on new EV sales was immediate. Transaction prices effectively rose across the board and lease deals that previously made EVs more accessible largely disappeared.

Sales figures show two clear trends.

In late 2025, many people rushed to purchase EVs before the tax credit ended. This resulted in a 44% spike in sales. Afterward, EV sales quickly declined. In early 2026, Americans purchased 212,600 EVs, a 28% drop compared to early 2025. The EV market share also fell to 5.8%, down from a high of 7.5%. But that decline might be slowing.

With more leased vehicles being returned and resold, the used EV market is growing, with a reported sales increase of 12% in early 2026. New EV price tags have also dropped more than 12% since demand slowed.

Another trend we're seeing is that automakers are adjusting their focus. Ford is shifting part of its EV battery production to manufacture batteries for other uses, such as data centers and electric utility equipment. In May, the "Ford Energy" group was created to concentrate on these efforts.

General Motors is also making changes, with a sharper focus on self-driving vehicle technologies. While these shifts are a result of slower EV sales, both companies continue to manufacture EVs.

Even with slower sales, new, lower-cost EV models are becoming more available.



Pricing for some new EV models, including the Chevy Bolt, is expected to start under \$30,000. Photo Source: Chevrolet



The 2026 Chevy Equinox EV starts at under \$35,000 and can travel up to 319 miles on a single charge. Photo Source: Chevrolet



One area where EV growth remains strong is commercial and delivery fleets. Amazon is rolling out thousands of electric delivery vehicles manufactured by Rivian, which are now a common sight in many communities. Photo credit: Rivian

The 2026 Chevy Equinox EV starts at under \$35,000 and can travel up to 319 miles on a single charge. Pricing for some newer models, including the Nissan LEAF and the Chevy Bolt, is expected to start under \$30,000. These lower prices might help more drivers consider EV options.

## Looking ahead

Outside the U.S., EV sales continue to grow. Around the world, one out of every four new vehicles sold in 2025 was an electric model, and experts expect that number to keep rising.

One area where EV growth remains strong is commercial and delivery fleets. Companies such as Amazon, UPS and FedEx, are adding electric vans and trucks to their daily operations. Amazon is rolling out thousands of electric delivery vehicles manufactured by Rivian, which are now a common sight in many communities. Fleet vehicles are a good fit for electrification because they follow set routes,

return to a central location each day and can charge overnight. This makes costs more predictable and easier to manage. Companies are expected to continue investing in EV fleets to reduce fuel costs and meet long-term goals.

Even with slowed sales, EVs represent a meaningful and growing source of electricity demand. The U.S. Department of Energy projects that in rural areas, home-based Level 1 and Level 2 charging could meet approximately 82% of EV electricity demand by 2030.

While the pace of EV adoption in the U.S. remains uncertain, electric co-ops are well positioned to adapt. By planning ahead and staying flexible, co-ops will continue to provide reliable, affordable power while supporting members as their energy needs evolve.

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

# TEACHING KIDS TO SAVE: FROM LIGHT SWITCHES TO LIFELONG HABITS

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Teaching your children to build good energy habits saves money on your electric bill today and sets them up for a lifetime of smart energy use. Here's how to get your family started on a household energy-saving adventure.

## Safety first

When it comes to electricity, start with safety basics. Secure cords so appliances, lamps or other plugged-in items can't be pulled down. Use outlet covers and safety plugs to keep little hands from getting injured.

As they get older, teach children not to stick things in outlets. When they are old enough to use outlets, let them know they should never unplug something by pulling the cord. When playing outside, educate them to stay away from downed power lines, keep a safe distance from all electrical equipment and avoid the dangers of electricity near water.

## Teaching energy habits

Keeping safety in mind, you can teach age-appropriate energy habits.

Turning off fans and lights when you leave a room is always a good habit to instill. Fully powering down TVs, computers and gaming systems reduces energy waste.

Keeping the refrigerator door open is a common energy waster for kiddos and some adults. Show them they can take a quick look inside and scan their options. If they need time to decide what they want, they can close the refrigerator while making up their minds.

Closing your home's doors is another way to keep heated or air-conditioned air inside. I wonder how many kids these days are asked if they were born in a barn or if they would even know what you mean?

Hot water is another area where families can save. In addition to



Reduce energy waste at home by teaching children how to fully power down electronics, such as gaming systems and TVs.



To avoid wasting energy, teach children to quickly look inside the refrigerator for options and then close the door while they decide on a snack.



Building positive energy habits with your children can start with small steps, including turning off lights when leaving a room or installing energy-efficient bulbs.

reducing wasted water, using less hot water helps lower your energy bill. Heating water is typically the second-highest energy use in a home behind heating and air conditioning. Reduce energy use by turning off the water while hand-washing dishes, taking short showers and not overfilling the bathtub.

## Gamify your bill

Review the electric bill with older children. Be sure to focus on energy use, which is shown in kilowatt-hours on your bill.

It's also a good opportunity to teach budgeting and household finances. If you save money on the electric bill, you may be able to do something fun with that money instead. Consider

a trip to mini golf, getting ice cream or choosing a longer-term goal to fund a weekend family trip.

Make it a game. Consider a family reward for using less energy than the previous month or the same month of the previous year, or an individual reward for the person who guesses how many kilowatt-hours you used that month. The winner gets to pick the movie for family night.

Exploring energy efficiency and conservation with your children doesn't have to be a chore. Find fun ways to build lifelong energy habits and save energy around your home.

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

# DORM ROOM SAFETY STARTS WITH SMART ELECTRICAL HABITS

Moving into a college dorm is an exciting milestone, but it's also a good time to remember electrical safety. Dorm rooms are often filled with laptops, gaming systems, mini refrigerators, fans and other electronics that can strain outlets if they're not used properly. Following a few simple safety practices can help prevent electrical hazards, protect your belongings and keep you and your roommates safe throughout the school year.

✔ **Unplug devices when not in use.** Unplug chargers, small appliances and other electronics when they're not being used. This saves energy and helps reduce fire risks in shared living spaces.

✔ **Avoid overloading outlets.** Dorm room outlets aren't designed to power multiple high-wattage devices at the same time. Spread electronics across available outlets and avoid plugging too many items into a single outlet or power strip.

✔ **Use surge protectors.** Choose surge protectors with overcurrent protection to help safeguard electronics from power surges and reduce the risk of circuit overloads.

✔ **Use extension cords only temporarily.** Extension cords are



intended for short-term use and should never replace permanent wiring. If you need additional outlets, use an approved surge protector instead.

✔ **Keep heat-producing appliances away from flammable materials.** Keep space heaters, lamps and other heat-producing appliances away from bedding, curtains, clothing and other combustible materials.

✔ **Report electrical problems immediately.** Tell your resident assistant or campus housing staff if you notice flickering lights, warm outlets, damaged cords or other electrical concerns. Never attempt electrical repairs yourself.

✔ **Look for safety certification labels.** Purchase electrical products that have been tested by a nationally recognized safety testing laboratory, such as UL, to help ensure they meet established safety standards.

✔ **Use GFCI outlets near water.** Bathrooms, kitchens and other areas near water should have ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets, which help protect against electric shock. If you notice a missing or damaged GFCI outlet, notify campus housing staff.

Making electrical safety part of your daily routine can help create a safer dorm room and provide peace of mind throughout the school year.

## 2027 ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE PHOTO CONTEST

Show off your creativity and share your best shots with us! Participate in our annual photo contest for a chance to showcase your talent and win up to \$100. Whether it's capturing breathtaking landscapes, memorable moments or community spirit, we want to see your unique perspective of southeast Iowa.

We will choose 13 photos to appear in the annual Access Energy Cooperative 2028 calendar. Each winning artist will receive \$75 plus an additional \$25 bill credit if they are a member of the cooperative.



## CONTEST DETAILS

Complete details and rules can be found on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com/photo](http://www.accessenergycoop.com/photo) or use the QR code.

Scan the QR code for more information:



# Energy Detective Challenge

School is back in session, and it's time to put your observation skills to work! Complete the challenges below and earn points by finding ways your family can save energy.



**Goal:**  
Score 20 points to become an Energy Detective! After you've earned 20 points, cut out the badge below and display it for all to see!



## SCAVENGER HUNT

COMPLETED

- A light is left on in an empty room (2 points) ☐
- A smart or programmable thermostat (4 points) ☐
- A ceiling fan spinning in a room where no one is spending time (2 points) ☐
- A charger plugged in with nothing connected to it (2 points) ☐
- An ENERGY STAR® label on an appliance (3 points) ☐
- A window or door left open or cracked when the heating/cooling system is on (3 points) ☐

## MISSIONS

COMPLETED

- Turn off the lights when you leave a room (3 points) ☐
- Open blinds or curtains during the day instead of turning on a light (3 points) ☐
- Unplug a charger that isn't being used (3 points) ☐
- Remind family members to close the refrigerator door quickly (3 points) ☐
- Help your family create a "lights out" check before bedtime (4 points) ☐



IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives

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

# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

A large white utility bucket truck is parked on a dirt road. Two workers wearing hard hats and safety vests are in the bucket. The truck has "Touchstone Energy Cooperatives" written on its side. In the background, there are orange traffic cones and a green field under a clear sky.

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative.** This commitment to provide electrical safety has always been our priority so we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
The power of human connections®