Co-op rebates are easy with Electric$ense website

Reminder to keep access around co-op equipment clear

3 ways to electrify lawncare

Now is the perfect time to start researching replacement of heating and cooling systems
New solar projects

This past month MiEnergy Cooperative finalized agreements with OneEnergy Renewables to construct and purchase the output from four utility-scale solar projects to be built in our service territory in 2020. OneEnergy recently completed utility-scale solar projects for MiEnergy’s municipal members, Lanesboro and St. Charles. The four projects will be located at MiEnergy’s Rushford office, near our Peterson substation, near Stockton and near Fountain. OneEnergy will develop and own the projects totaling over nine megawatts of capacity. MiEnergy, through a purchase power agreement, will purchase the output for the next 25 years.

The location of these projects was a critical part of their development. While MiEnergy has 43 substations across our cooperative’s service territory, consistent electric loading from member electric use was limited to just a handful of sites near substations for these utility-scale solar generation projects. In turn, each of the four projects’ generation output will be consumed with member use and not backflow from overloading the distribution to the transmission system. These strategic locations will be providing transmission savings and lower cost of renewable energy to all our members as a wholesale power costs savings.

Through the permitting process for these projects in Fillmore County, Winona County and the City of Rushford Village, discussions on locating these projects on non-productive land versus productive agriculture land occurred. It is an important discussion. The MiEnergy projects will lease 60 acres of land from members, some of which is productive agricultural land, some is not. The sites will be fenced and seeded with pollinator cover, much like a government Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) agreement. At the expiration of the agreement, the solar piles and fencing will be removed, which is guaranteed through a bond established for each project.

Members have communicated that they support more local renewable energy as part of our wholesale power supply mix. MiEnergy has the two community solar projects, one at each office called Renewable Rays. We also have ownership in a utility-scale solar project, Minnesota Three (517 kW system) in Oronooco, Minn., which is owned jointly by us, Freeborn-Mower Cooperative Services and People’s Energy Cooperative. These arrays and our new sites will account for nearly 10% of our cooperative’s total capacity and are in addition to Dairyland Power Cooperative’s (DPC) growing renewable energy portfolio that includes wind, hydro and solar generation.

DPC continues to be our primary wholesale power supplier and supported our request to own or contract for local renewable energy in our service territory. DPC granted MiEnergy and its other 23 cooperative members the right to own or purchase local renewable energy for up to 10% of the individual cooperative’s summer peak capacity. MiEnergy’s 10% carve-out is equivalent to 10 megawatts.

As you all know, MiEnergy Cooperative is a member-owned electric distribution cooperative that has a 501(c)(2) nonprofit tax exemption. Therefore, the current incentives for solar generation that include tax credits and accelerated depreciation cannot be utilized by our electric cooperative. This is the reason for a power purchase agreement structure with OneEnergy, a for-profit entity that can utilize the solar incentives and offer a lower energy cost to MiEnergy.

The end result of these four new utility-scale solar projects is increased local renewable energy for MiEnergy members and a lower wholesale power energy cost from local renewable energy projects within our cooperative service territory. As always, I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.
Prepare your home to handle Midwest weather

Research HVAC options between seasons

The experts at MiEnergy have some tips to help you prepare your home to handle the extreme heat and cold temperatures that we experience in northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota.

The time to prepare is before extreme seasons arrive. We encourage you to do research during the seasons of spring and fall while temperatures are fairly moderate.

Now is a great time to start planning for a new heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) unit for your home, farm or business, before an equipment failure occurs. You will also gain peace of mind knowing that you’ve done your research to purchase an energy efficient unit that will help save money on your energy bill and not leave you high and dry.

If you’re in the market for a new HVAC unit, consider a heat pump. A greener heating option, heat pumps transfer heat from one place to another. An air-source heat pump can transfer heat between the air inside a home and the air outside a home, while ground-source heat pumps (also known as geothermal heat pumps) transfer heat between the air inside a home and the ground outside a home.

Heat pumps can be used for both heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. At a maximum, ground-source heat pumps can be 300 percent efficient and at a minimum, all heat pumps are 100 percent efficient. Newer air-source heat pumps now offer legitimate heating in cold regions with new technological advancements with cold climate air-source heat pumps.

If you’re shopping for a new energy efficient unit, check the efficiency rating, or SEER. The higher the SEER number, the more efficient the HVAC system. Consider buying an Energy Star approved unit, which uses around 14 percent less energy than traditional central air units. Appliances with an Energy Star rating meet and often exceed energy efficiency standards and can end up saving you money over the lifetime of the appliance.


Spring is just around the corner. If you’re in the market to upgrade your lawn care equipment, you may want to consider electric (or battery-powered) options.

Gas-powered lawn mowers and trimmers may be your go-to, but times are changing. Electric options are becoming more popular than ever, offering faster charging times, longer battery life and quieter, greener products compared to their gas-powered counterparts. Here are three ways to electrify your lawn care this spring:

1. **Electric Lawn Mowers**

   Electric lawn mowers have come a long way over the last few years. Early models required corded connections, which were tricky to manage— but the cord has been cut. Newer cordless electric mowers are more expensive than gas-powered mowers, but much of the upfront cost can be recovered since electricity is a less expensive fuel than gas, and electric engines generally require less maintenance than gas engines. Cordless electric mowers typically range from $200 to $500.

   Electric mowers are suitable for most lawn care needs, with batteries that typically require about one to two hours to fully charge, and most batteries can run for a full hour. If you have a large yard (half an acre or larger) a gas-powered option works best.

2. **Electric Trimmers**

   Cordless electric string trimmers are a great option for most lawns. New versions of electric trimmers are improving and considered worthy competitors of gas-powered models. Cordless electric trimmers are much quieter and easier to use. Most battery-powered models can be charged in 30 to 45 minutes. If you have a lot of space to trim, you may want to consider a back-up battery to work in short bursts. If you’re interested in purchasing an electric trimmer, the main factors to consider are the battery’s life, charge time and power. Costs can vary depending on your needs, but you can find a quality version for about $100.

3. **Electric Leaf Blowers**

   After cutting and trimming your lawn, you’ll need to clear off those walkways and patios. Cordless electric leaf blowers are lightweight and easy to maneuver. They don’t offer quite as much power as gas powered and corded blowers. If your leaf blowing and cleaning needs are minimal, a cordless electric leaf blower can get the job done. Costs vary depending on power and battery quality, but you can purchase a dependable model for about $125 and up.

   If you’re looking to electrify your lawn care equipment, be sure to do your homework. With a little research, you’ll be well on your way to Lawn of the Month – with less maintenance, hassle and noise (and your neighbors will thank you)!

### RECare Consumer Contribution Fund

RECare is a consumer contribution fund in which members like you assist other members who need help in paying utility bills. Consider a one-time contribution or enroll to provide monthly contributions. Whether it is $1, $5, or $10 a month or a single donation of an amount of your choice, when combined with those of other generous members, your assistance can go a long way in helping others. MiEnergy Cooperative appreciates your generosity and the pledges given by members to help our members in need.

What a great way to show you care about your community and know that you can make a difference! Complete the form or visit www.MiEnergy.coop to fill out a donation form.

**MINNESOTA MEMBERS:** To apply for RECare funds, please contact the MiEnergy office at 800-432-2285.

**IOWA MEMBERS:** To apply for RECare funds, please contact Northeast Iowa Community Action offices in Chickasaw, Howard and Winneshiek counties.
Don’t obstruct access to equipment

Electric meters, transformers, poles and lines keep MiEnergy’s electric system running smoothly, but they are often overlooked, including being blocked by landscaping, fences, equipment or even structures placed by homeowners. It is important to not obstruct access to the co-op’s electric equipment. Do not, install fences around or plant immediately around electrical boxes, poles or orange guy wires. Efforts to disguise them could limit utility service access.

UNDERGROUND

Pad-mounted transformers and switch cabinets (both are the big green boxes) carry high voltages of electricity that serve many homes. It is critical to keep areas surrounding them clear so that MiEnergy employees can safely maintain them. Keep shrubs and structures at least 10 feet away from the cabinet doors and three feet away from the sides. Tree roots can grow and interfere with underground wire, pipes and cables. Future repairs to the transformer also could damage plants and trees planted too close. Plan ahead and know the clearance requirements to avoid situations that can slow outage restoration times or create safety hazards for line personnel.

OVERHEAD

When landscaping, plant tall-growing trees safely away from power lines and seek help in choosing and planting trees and bushes that won’t grow to interfere with electrical equipment. Plant at least 10 feet away from the base of the utility poles and keep vegetation less than 8 feet high. Any trees or shrubs will be pruned if they are not within these safe guidelines. Do not attach anything to our poles or guy wires and do not install any objects or structures within 10 feet of the poles. This could result in safety hazards for line personnel needing to work near the pole or guy wires.

Preserving gold status

MiEnergy’s board directors Charles Franz and Jenny Schimmer were recently recognized for maintaining their Director Gold status. This program offered through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is geared toward directors who are committed to continuing their education to achieve a tangible credential that reinforces their stature as part of a group of experienced and educated directors. Directors must continue to earn education credits by attending various conferences or continuing educational courses within 24 months of receiving their Director Gold certificates. Congratulations to Charles and Jenny for completing this program in 2018 and for your continued efforts to maintain your Director Gold status in 2020.

Personnel changes around the co-op

RETIREMENT

Kaye Bernard retired from MiEnergy on February 28 as chief operating officer. She has worked for the cooperative since September 1986, beginning as a receptionist. Thanks to Kaye for her years of service and dedication. We wish her the very best in retirement.

PROMOTIONS

Darrin Peterson has been promoted to foreman of the Spring Valley outpost and began his role on Dec. 9, 2019. He has worked for the cooperative since May 2019.

Mark Dornink has been promoted to distribution technician foreman and began his new role on Dec. 16, 2019. He has worked for the cooperative since 2003.

Adrienne Lofgren has been promoted to manager of billing and collections and began her new role at the cooperative on March 2. She has worked for the co-op since 2007.

NEW EMPLOYEE

Mark Dornink accepted the journeyman lineman position at the Spring Valley outpost and started on February 10. Mark had been working for the City of Spring Valley and brings experience and familiarity with Spring Valley and surrounding areas.

Mark is originally from Preston. We welcome Mark to MiEnergy Cooperative.
Driving change
Annual meeting to reflect on 2019 and look ahead for 2020

As a member of MiEnergy, you have a perspective that is valuable and we invite you to share it with the co-op. At the annual meeting, co-op leaders will discuss the financial health of the cooperative, along with priorities and challenges.

We invite members to attend the one-hour business meeting set for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 22 at the Mabel Community Center in Mabel, Minn. Doors open for registration at 6 p.m.

FIRST DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

The results of the board director elections for District 1 will occur at the annual meeting. This is the first election since the merger of Hawkeye REC and Tri-County Electric Cooperative in 2017.

2020 Director Candidates for District 1:
- Seat #1: Dennis Ptacek (Incumbent) is running unopposed
- Seat #2: Jeffery Redalen (Incumbent) is being challenged by Dave Ruen

A voting ballot, biographies for each candidate and instructions will be mailed to District 1 members March 20. Ballots are mailed from Survey and Ballot Systems, of Eden Prairie, Minn., and it could take three to five days to receive. Members can vote by mail, online or at the annual meeting. Survey and Ballot will be collecting and tabulating ballots and security measures are in place to protect the confidentiality of your vote and to prevent duplicate voting.

The 2019 annual report will be mailed to all members April 7.