



Freeborn
Mower
Electric
Cooperative

People. Power. Possibilities.

county lines

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2025 • VOLUME 86 • NO. 02



Operation Round Up Volunteer Board of Trustees (l-r) Darrell Ingvaldson, Rhonda Allison, Brenda Wichmann, and Dan Bodensteiner. Missing from photo, Joni Osmundson.

SMALL CHANGE MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE!

In 2024, a total of \$101,893 was donated to 148 local charities and nonprofit organizations in Freeborn and Mower counties, thanks to the generosity of co-op members who participate in Operation Round Up. Every penny rounded up makes a meaningful impact, helping to support critical programs and services in our community.

WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY!

There is nothing that we love more than supporting our local communities through the Operation Round Up® (ORU) program, which is fully funded through the generosity of our members.

ORU is an opt-out program that rounds a member's electric bill to the nearest whole dollar. Never more than ninety-nine cents per month, the pennies add up to thousands of dollars each year to give back to charities and non-profit organizations within our service territory.

In 2024, the ORU Board of Trustees distributed \$101,893 in grants which helped support local schools, clubs, food shelves, and numerous other initiatives. The reach of the dollars is widespread, with dozens of grant recipients across Freeborn and Mower counties. Here's just a few of the ways we've been able to give back this year:

- Volunteer Fire Departments have used the grant money to purchase necessary equipment such as turnout gear and rescue tools to enhance their response capabilities.
- Food and snacks have been purchased to ensure students in our community don't go hungry after school and over the weekend.

- Quilters have used the funds to buy supplies for making quilts for individuals in our community that are in need.
- Schools used the funds to purchase supplies to enrich their classrooms.
- ... and much more!

One of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative principles is "Concern for Community" and part of how we show our care is by giving back.

We extend our gratitude to our five-member board of trustees who generously volunteer their time and expertise to support this program. Each quarter, this group reviews all applications and carefully considers how the funds are distributed within the community. Their goal is to ensure that the money is directed toward projects and events with the greatest impact on our community.

Grants are distributed on a quarterly basis. #172200 The next application deadline is March 15, 2025. Please visit www.fmec.coop for more details.

ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO



NAVIGATING CHANGE: ENSURING RELIABILITY THROUGH COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE

Our members play a crucial role in the democratic process at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative. Democratic member control is one of our Seven Cooperative Principles, where members actively participate in setting policies and making decisions for the cooperative. We see this in many ways, but especially right now as we hold director elections for Districts 2, 5, and 8.

Additionally, all FMEC members have the opportunity to approve or deny the proposed Bylaw and Articles of Incorporation changes by casting their vote via the mail ballot by February 20th, 2025. It's important to understand these recommendations and the "why" behind the proposed changes.

You'll notice in the Articles of Incorporation, we are recommending removing the debt ceiling that can be acquired by the cooperative. #2217001 Though there are several reasons for recommending this change, it's imperative for the cooperative to have the ability to make necessary decisions in a more timely manner, especially as it relates to needs that will directly impact reliability. We believe the energy transition that we are in will require more frequent considerations as investments are made in our system for energy delivery.

In addition, our main borrower, the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), has a very specific method for calculating the debt limit where the original amount of a loan is included against the limit instead of the amount outstanding, meaning the cooperative approaches the limit much faster than the actual outstanding/unpaid loans grow over time.

Example: Original loan from 20 years ago for \$5 million has \$500,000 left to pay on it. The calculation includes the \$5 million instead of the \$500,000.

Inflation impacts (last 4 years or so) in our system materials has also accelerated the need to make this change by a couple of years.

While a numeric debt limit is being removed from the Articles, the debt limit of the cooperative will continue to be reviewed annually by our nine member-elected board of directors, CEO, and finance team to ensure that our cooperative continues to operate in a way that reflects our commitment to stewarding resources well on our members behalf.

- Jim Krueger

UPDATE: DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

As of 3:30 p.m. on Friday, January 17, 2025, the final filing date for directorship by petition, the following members have filed for directorship.

- DISTRICT 2:** Jay Neitzell (incumbent)
John Penkava
- DISTRICT 5:** Frank Fryer (incumbent)
- DISTRICT 8:** William Trygstad (incumbent)

When there is a single nominee in the district, that applicant is deemed elected as Director. When there are multiple nominees in a district, a biography of each nominee will be sent to all members of the district. Returned ballots are due on Thursday, February 20, 2025. Ballots must be returned in the provided envelope to the third-party balloting company and not to our cooperative. Allow for possible mail delays.

Elected directors will be seated during the upcoming annual meeting on Tuesday, April 1, 2025.

member news

OFFICE CLOSED

Monday, February 17
Staff Development

Call (507) 373-6421 or (800) 734-6421 for 24/7 emergency and outage reporting.

COLD WEATHER RULE REMINDER

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members who may have trouble paying their winter energy bills are reminded the Cold Weather Rule is in effect from October 1 through April 30.

If you are unable to pay your electric bill by the due date, you must contact our office to arrange a payment plan. Your service may be discontinued, even during the winter months if you fail to respond to the disconnect notice.



As our world and nation continue to lean into renewable energy sources to meet the ever-growing demand for power, many of us are left wondering what all the buzz is about?

The allure of solar energy stems from its ability to convert sunlight directly into electricity through photovoltaic (PV) cells, offering a sustainable and potentially inexhaustible power source.

A solar PV system, made up of panels that capture sunlight, can be installed on rooftops, often working seamlessly with already existing structures. These systems can also be installed on the ground, if the property has space available.

Before considering solar, it is important to understand the energy consumption patterns in your home. Certain factors such as tree coverage, roof orientation, and pitch need to be evaluated to determine the feasibility of installing a solar array on the property. In some areas, solar energy is a cost-competitive option, while in other areas, the return on investment may take several years to materialize.

Solar energy systems typically require a significant investment upfront. However, there may be federal tax credits, state grants, or rebates available to reduce the initial financial impact. #172200 The Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative Energy Solutions team is readily available to assist you as you consider if transitioning to solar energy is right for you.

For more information, please contact Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative Energy Solutions Department by calling (507) 373-6421 or by emailing energysolutions@fmec.coop.



We invite our members to join us!

FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

Albert Lea High School
Registration | Meal 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Bingo 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Business Meeting 6:30 p.m.

We look forward to having you join us!

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE! APPLY NOW.



LUCK OF THE DRAW SCHOLARSHIPS

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative offers fifteen Luck of the Draw Scholarships.

PROGRAM DETAILS:

- Fifteen scholarships of \$1,000 will be awarded.
- The Luck of the Draw Scholarship drawing will be held Tuesday evening, April 1, 2025, during the cooperative's annual meeting. The meeting will be held at the Albert Lea High School, 2000 Tiger Lane, Albert Lea, MN.
- **Must be present to win.**

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Applicant must be a graduating high school senior.
- Parents/legal guardians must be active members of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative at the time of the drawing and reside in our service territory.
- Recipients must be full-time college students in the fall of 2025.
- Proof of enrollment must be presented to Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative before the funds will be disbursed to the school. Proof of enrollment does not need to accompany the application.
- In the event the student is unable to fulfill his/her enrollment obligations, the award is forfeited.

Applications are available online or from our office.
The application deadline is March 21, 2025, by 3:30 p.m.

For further information, please contact:
 Lori Jimenez | (507) 379-8852

ELECTRIC LINeworker SCHOLARSHIPS

Two applicants pursuing post-secondary education in an Electric Lineworker program will each be awarded a scholarship for \$1,000, payable in two payments. #1472901 Electrical lineworkers install, maintain, and restore electric power lines.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS ARE:

- Recipients must be enrolled in an Electric Lineworker Program to begin in the fall of the current year. In the event the lineworker program is full and the college of choice is maintaining a student waiting list, the recipient must provide proof in writing in order to hold funds for the next open enrollment period.
- The student must successfully complete the first semester with a grade point average of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale to be awarded the second half of the scholarship funds.
- Preference will be given to Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members and residents of Freeborn and Mower counties.
- Selection criteria will be based on scholastic achievement, school and community involvement, work history, and an essay submission.

Applications are available online or from our office.
The application deadline is March 1, 2025, by 3:30 p.m.

- Minnesota Colleges Offering Training in this Field:
- **Minnesota West Community & Technical College**
 Jackson, MN - (800) 658-2330 | www.mnwest.edu
 - **Dakota County Technical College**
 Rosemount, MN - (877) 937-3282 | www.dctc.edu
 - **Minnesota State Community & Technical College - Wadena**
 Wadena, MN - (877) 450-3322 | www.minnesota.edu/wadena

RIVERLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is proud to offer scholarships to Riverland Community College. Scholarships are awarded to children of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members and also to adult members of the cooperative returning to school to further their education.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS ARE:

- To hold a current membership in Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative or be the child of a current member.
- Have demonstrated financial need.
- Be enrolled as a full-time student in any field.

Non-traditional students are encouraged to apply.

Please contact Riverland Foundation for information and scholarship applications at (507) 433-0630.

UNCLAIMED CAPITAL CREDITS ARE USED TO FUND FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE SCHOLARSHIPS.

KEEP YOUR CONTACT INFO CURRENT!

Your accurate contact details mean:

- **FASTER OUTAGE RESTORATION**
 We can locate and resolve issues more quickly.
- **TIMELY UPDATES**
 Be the first to know about planned outages, events, and programs.
- **SEAMLESS COMMUNICATION**
 Enjoy smooth service and billing support.

Update your info today by calling us or logging into SmartHub. Let's stay connected!

WHERE HAVE THEY GONE?

We need your help locating these former members.

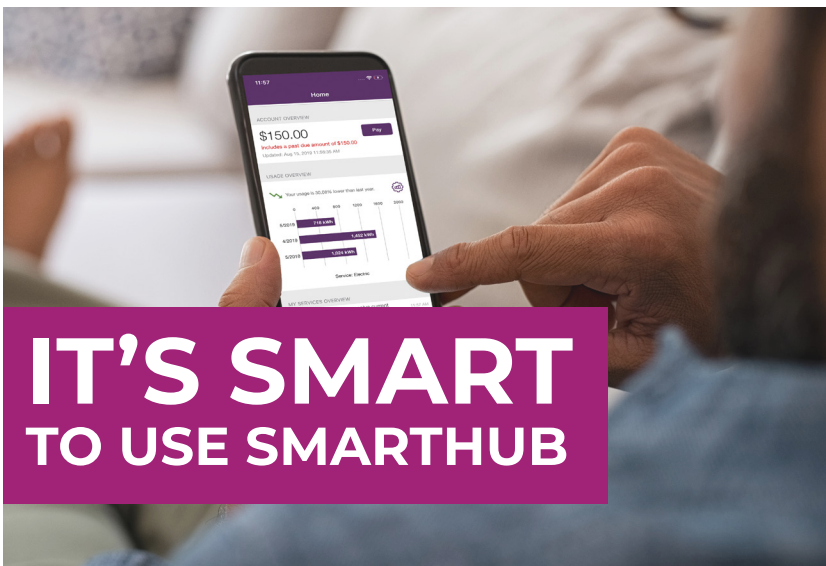
Capital Credit checks for the 2024 general retirement were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. If these former members do not claim their Capital Credit disbursement, the money will be forfeited per Minnesota Statute and will be used to fund scholarships. If you have contact information for any of these people, please contact Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative at (507) 379-8860 or joanne.miller@fmec.coop.

MELISSA R. AKKERMAN
 JOE ALCALA JR
 ROXANE R. ALDEN
 DYLAN J. ALLEN
 AMBER L. RADKE
 GARY L. ANDERSON
 DAVID D. BACKHAUS
 ARNIE C. BOOT
 TODD CHESSMORE
 PEGGY CHESSMORE
 VIRGIL COLE
 LORI J. COOPER
 JOSEPH T. CUNNINGHAM
 DAVID L. DOPPELHAMMER
 PETER A. ESCOBAR
 CASSANDRA A. EUBANKS
 E-Z OWN PLUS
 MARGARET FEGAN
 JENNIFER L. FIALA
 CAROLYN R. FLESCH
 JOANN M. FOGAL

JERRY B. FRANSON
 RHONDA FREDRICKSON
 LORI M. GRANT
 DOUGLAS HAINES
 RONALD G. HAROLDSON
 JOANN HAROLDSON
 GLEN A. HOHEISEL
 LUPE M. HOHEISEL
 DONALD HOLST
 MICHAEL A. HUTCHINSON
 HAZEL A. JACOBSON
 LILLIAN M. JENSEN
 KENNETH R. JOHNSTON
 SHIRLEY J. KLEBESADEL
 DEAN A. KNUTSON
 ANITA J. KNUTSON
 DENNIS KOLB
 YVONNE KRAUSE
 THERON M. LANGRUD
 JUDY C. LANGRUD
 KENT E. LENZ

MICHELLE F. LENZ
 CAITLIN M. LIEDER
 DARLENE LIMESAND
 MALISON LOR
 BRIAN L. MARCKS
 DAWN M. MARCKS
 DAN MCGUIRE
 BETTY MERTEN
 CHRISTOPHER A. MEYER
 JILL M. MULLENBACH
 PATRICK E. NELSON
 CLARICE M. OLSON
 KATHLEEN PARSONS
 HSER PAW
 MATTHEW B. PERRY
 KERRI J. PERRY
 DORA T. POLK
 RICHARD A. RABEHL
 JO-ELLYN RALEIGH
 VERONICA G. RAMOS
 GERALD M. ROCHEFORD

JAZMYN M. RODRIGUEZ
 LEO P. ROE
 GREGORY S. RYAN
 MICHELE P. RYAN
 ROGER D. SCHRAMM
 JOHN E. SCHWEITZER
 PATTY SCHWEITZER
 DAH K. HEH
 BRUCE E. STEWART
 CHRISTA A. STIELER
 GAYLA J. STONE
 DESIREE L. TALAMANTES
 BENJAMIN M. THORPE
 DAVID W ULSTAD
 TYLER J. VANBUSKIRK
 TEYARA M. VAN HOOK
 EMILY A. WADE
 AMY B. WAGNER
 RODNEY WAYNE
 TRAVIS B. WILSON
 VERONA E. WINEGAR



IT'S SMART TO USE SMARTHUB

SmartHub is a powerful tool designed to enhance the member experience by providing comprehensive control and convenience in managing electric service accounts. Here are some key benefits of using SmartHub:

ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT:

Members can easily view and manage their accounts from anywhere, at any time. This includes checking current and past billing statements, monitoring usage, and making payments securely online.

USAGE MONITORING:

SmartHub provides detailed insights into energy consumption. Members can track their daily, weekly, and monthly usage patterns, helping them identify areas to conserve energy and reduce costs. This real-time data can lead to smarter energy habits and improved efficiency.

PAYMENT CONVENIENCE:

With SmartHub, members can set up automatic payments, reducing the risk of late fees and ensuring their accounts remain in good standing. The option to choose different payment methods further adds to the flexibility.

NOTIFICATIONS AND ALERTS:

Members can receive customized notifications and alerts about billing, energy usage, and other account-related activities. These alerts help members stay informed and proactive about their energy consumption and account status.

OUTAGE REPORTING AND UPDATES:

In case of power outages, SmartHub allows members to report outages quickly. This feature enhances communication and trust, as members stay updated on the efforts to restore service.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE:

The integration of SmartHub into FMEC's services significantly enhances customer support. #2217001 Members can resolve many issues independently and efficiently, reducing the need for direct support calls and improving overall satisfaction.

In summary, SmartHub empowers members with greater control, efficiency, and reliability, making it a valuable tool for managing their energy usage and service accounts. Through its intuitive and user-friendly platform, SmartHub fosters a better and more informed user experience.

HAPPY RETIREMENT!

Loren Sprague began his career as a line worker at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative on May 29, 1990. He retired as a Working Foreman, and his career will be remembered for his unwavering dedication and leadership. When asked what he appreciated most about working for FMEC, he expressed gratitude for being well-equipped with the right tools and equipment to restore power safely and efficiently. "Not every cooperative is like that," he noted. In addition to having the necessary tools, FMEC was committed to providing mutual aid, and he estimated that he contributed to mutual aid efforts 12 to 15 times throughout his career when other cooperatives needed assistance.

After nearly 38 years in the field, Loren gained a wealth of knowledge and insight. #1472901 He shared one key piece of advice for those starting their careers as line workers: "Respect other linemen and foremen. You need to always have your thinking cap on, especially when working with live overhead lines. There is no question that is too dumb to ask. When in doubt, always ask."

One might assume that after a career like Loren's, his retirement would be filled with rest and relaxation. However, that's not quite the case. He currently manages four other businesses in the area, which he will continue to oversee alongside his wife, Shari.

Congratulations, Loren, on a respected career and a well-deserved retirement! You have left a legacy at FMEC that will not be forgotten. We wish you all the best.



FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EARNS AN ACSI® 2024 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AWARD

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) is honored to have earned a 2024 Customer Satisfaction Award* from the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI®) based on our member survey results. Members were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with us, how well we lived up to their expectations, and how well we measured up to their ideal co-op experience. While these were not the only questions in the survey, we included these specifically because they are the core components of the proprietary ACSI methodology.

FMEC's ACSI score substantially outperforms the industry average score earned by publicly measured utilities reported in the 2024 ACSI Energy Utility Study. This Award is a testament to our ongoing efforts to provide the best possible member experience. The 2024 Customer Satisfaction Award affirms that FMEC's hard work has been noticed by its members. FMEC is grateful for its members and will continue to strive for excellence through constant dedication to improvement.

*Award criteria are determined by the ACSI® and are based on customers rating their satisfaction in a survey independent of the syndicated ACSI Energy Utility Study. For more about the ACSI, visit www.theacsi.org/badges. ACSI and its logo are registered trademarks of the American Customer Satisfaction Index LLC.

CLASSIFIED marketplace



NOTICE

There will be no classified ads taken for the March newsletter publication as it will be the Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative Annual Report.

FOR SALE

VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:

2004 BUICK PARK AVENUE. 100,058 actual miles. No rust. Text or Call (507) 438-6469.

FARM:

CUB CADET TRACTOR. Snowblower, cab PS, hydrostatic, hydraulic lift, 22 HP. \$2,300. Call (507) 273-6063.

SMALL SQUARE BALES OF HAY.

Good quality mixed hay, no rain. Call (507) 440-2255.

LESTERS HOG FINISHING BLDG.

36' x 64', 8' ceilings, glass board interior walls. Buyer pays for moving. \$1,000 OBO. Call (507) 383-6353.

MISCELLANEOUS:

METAL TOY TRUCK. 7" x 15" with wooden box-new condition. \$25.00 OBO. Call (507) 373-0093.

1941 PIPER J5B AIRPLANE.

Nice, airplane in hanger, at Austin airport. \$40,000 negotiable. Call (507) 606-8071.

8" GAS ICE AUGER.

Call (507) 440-3261.

AQUARIUM. 55-gallon tank. \$100.00. Call (507) 273-2141 for details and leave a message.

MANTIS GARDEN TILLER.

9" 2-cycle with planter tine. \$50.00. Call (507) 373-0135 for more info.

TIME LIFE CIVIL WAR BOOKS.

Complete Set of 28. Excellent Condition. Paid \$30 each. Asking \$120.00 OBO. Call (507) 460-8601.

PETS/ANIMALS:

REGISTERED LABS. Ready for homes February 14. Blacks and yellows, outstanding bloodline. Call (507) 473-0184.

WANTED

FENTON GLASS DISHES.

Call (507) 402-0880.

VINTAGE CHRISTMAS DÉCOR.

Knick knacks, ornaments, anything Christmas from the 70's and older. Call (507) 440-6482.

FREE

KIMBALL PIANO WITH BENCH.

Good condition. You haul. Text or Call (507) 279-2845.

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE RULES

Classified Marketplace ads are printed in our monthly **County Lines** newsletter **FREE OF CHARGE** to our current members.

- Ad deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the issue in which it will be printed. Ads received after the 15th of the month will be printed a month later. Example: An ad received on or before June 15th will appear in the July issue. If it is received on June 16th or later, it will appear in the August issue.
- A Classified Marketplace section appears in each issue except for our special Annual Report issue, typically in March.
- We take ads in these categories: For Sale; Wanted; Free/Giveaway
- Ads can be for: Vehicles/Motorized; Animals; Household; Farm; Miscellaneous
- No business ads will be accepted. Ads must be submitted in writing or electronically, not by phone call.
- Ads will not be repeated.

You will find a downloadable form on our website: www.fmec.coop. Select **MY COOPERATIVE**. Click on **NEWSLETTER** under **NEWS & INFO** tab.

You may also email ads to michelle.rayman@fmec.coop or go to the website, use the instructions above, and click on the **NEWSLETTER** tab to electronically submit an ad.

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Postmaster: Send address corrections to:
County Lines, P.O. Box 611, Albert Lea, MN 56007-0611

County Lines is published monthly, except for the Annual Report edition, by Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, 3366 Bridge Avenue, Albert Lea, MN 56007. This monthly publication is designed to provide information about the cooperative to the member-owners of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative.

President: Jim Krueger, President & CEO
Telephone: (507) 373-6421

SPQ YOUR NUMBER

WIN A \$25 BILL CREDIT

To reward our faithful newsletter readers, we've randomly selected and hidden three (3) member account numbers and placed them in the newsletter, each two times. Hidden account numbers are spelled out numerically. (Ex: #123456)

If you spot your full account number, contact the cooperative by the 15th of the current month to claim your \$25 bill credit.



FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

PO Box 611
3366 Bridge Avenue
Albert Lea MN 56007

(507) 373-6421 or (800) 734-6421
www.fmec.coop | info@fmec.coop



Business Hours:

Monday - Friday, 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Lobby Hours:

Monday - Thursday, 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Friday, By appointment only

Board Meetings:

Typically the last Tuesday of each month.

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



LAST CALL YOUTH TOUR 2025



If you are a junior or senior in high school, this opportunity is for YOU!

Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. to learn valuable leadership skills, meet with legislators, and make life-long friendships! The deadline to apply is approaching quickly on February 7, 2025. Please visit www.fmec.coop for more details.

LET'S COOK



CHICKEN ALMONDINE

Submitted By: Karen Schaufler

- ¾ C. diced green pepper
- 4 Tbsp. of butter
- 1/3 C. flour
- 2 C. chicken broth
- 1 C. light cream
- 1/8 Tsp. nutmeg
- 1 Tsp. salt
- Dash of pepper
- 3-1/2 C. diced cooked chicken
- 1 lg can mushrooms
- 3 Tbsp. cooking sherry
- 1/3 C. diced pimento
- ½ C. toasted almonds

Directions:

Sauté green pepper in butter; blend in flour until smooth. Stir in broth and cream. Add nutmeg, salt, pepper, chicken, and mushrooms. Simmer. Add remaining ingredients just before serving. Serve in pastry shells or on toast points, if desired. 6-8 Servings.

Members may submit one short recipe per month by email to michelle.rayman@fmec.coop or by mail at FMEC Newsletter, PO Box 611, Albert Lea, MN 56007. The member whose recipe is published will receive a \$10 electric bill credit.