



FOCUS ON THE FUTURE GRID

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) owns and operates its local electric distribution system, providing retail electric services to its member-owners. Of course, our ability to do so depends on a much broader network of interconnected utility infrastructure that spreads across the region, from state to state, across the nation, and also into Canada. Not only are there interconnections of equipment, transmission and distribution power lines, and generation plants, the various business entities involved must coordinate and work together. Massive, technological, mechanical, and essential — we refer to this as the electric grid.

America's electric cooperatives cover about 56% of the nation's land mass and provide power to more than 21.5 million businesses, homes, schools, and farms in 48 states. So, you might wonder who is monitoring the grid and #1450200 preparing it to meet the needs of electric cooperative members, like those of FMEC?

The national service organization representing America's electric cooperatives is the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). An offshoot not-for-profit entity, NRECA Research, is working to develop and demonstrate new

technical capabilities that directly address challenges and opportunities of the electric grid in the future.

NRECA Research leverages extensive internal expertise and established industry partnerships in this quest. It envisions the future and anticipates the challenges our cooperative members may face and solves them with applied science and engineering. The entity's work aims to support decision-making and the application of solutions that result in affordable power delivered across a reliable and resilient electric grid.

The mission of NRECA Research focuses on four strategic concentrations:

- **ENERGY SECTOR CYBERSECURITY**
for a secure present and future electric grid.
- **UTILITY DATA ANALYTICS**
for the data-driven and analytic grid.
- **SENSOR AND CONTROL NETWORKS**
for the integrated grid.
- **EQUITY AND ENERGY ACCESS**
for fair, equitable use of the grid.

ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO



ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESSFUL GOVERNANCE

The mission of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is very straightforward. It simply states that we are **“committed to serving our members by providing power to their lives.”** This mission statement clearly places our members at the center of all we do.

Determining the most appropriate business decisions for this cooperative and its membership calls upon me, my departmental staff, and your board of directors to always refer to our core values for guidance. These seven core values became the heart of our recent strategic planning discussions: **Integrity, Safety, Quality, Engagement, Teamwork, Community, and Service.** We endeavor daily to live up to these values in all our dealings.

Throughout the strategic planning process, it became clear that a strong future for FMEC depends on our commitment to staying vigilant to high ethical standards. To be ethical, decisions need to be the result of balancing out all available options before determining

the best choice. If FMEC leadership remains clear on our core values and stays connected to our mission, we will ensure accountability to you, our members. #353803 In order to gain and retain your trust, it is also imperative that authenticity and transparency are deeply ingrained in all decision-making.

The electric industry is certain to face some tumultuous times ahead. Difficult decisions will need to be made. The policies we make, and actions we take, will be complex and nuanced. As we move forward, my pledge to you is that FMEC leadership will strive to stay well-informed so we can take proactive steps whenever possible.

Next month’s publication will recap 2023. FMEC’s core values will be demonstrated throughout the Annual Report where you can review the numerous ways that FMEC lives out its commitment to our members. I hope to see you at the upcoming annual meeting!

**FREEBORN MOWER
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
ANNUAL MEETING**

TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 26, 2024

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.

LEGAL NOTICE 87TH ANNUAL MEETING FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Notice is hereby given that the annual business meeting of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative will be held on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. at Albert Lea High School, 2000 Tiger Lane, Albert Lea, MN.

The purpose of the meeting will be to conduct regular annual meeting business. Registration is required. This meeting will be in person only. Registration is required and will take place at the meeting.

Frank Fryer, Secretary

member news

OFFICE CLOSED

Monday, February 19
Staff Development

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

DIRECTOR ELECTION UPDATE

As of 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, the final filing date for directorship by petition, the following members have filed for directorship.

- DISTRICT 1:** Dennis Anderson (incumbent)
Michael Czaplewski
- DISTRICT 4:** Richard Schaufler (incumbent)
- DISTRICT 7:** Jack Korman (incumbent)
Larry Gooden

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 Monday, February 19, 2024. #1358101 Ballots will be accepted through February 20, due to President’s Day. 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.

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.

WINTER ENERGY SAVINGS



There is still time to take steps to reduce your home energy consumption this winter.

As we spend more time indoors and heating systems work overtime during the wintertime, Minnesotans consume a great amount of electricity. We also tend to use our ovens more often and turn to using auxiliary heaters. Reduce wasted energy by following these suggestions.

- 1. MAINTAIN HEATING EQUIPMENT** Replace dirty clogged filters and have the equipment inspected for necessary maintenance.
- 2. REMOVE ITEMS BLOCKING VENTS** Avoid blocking heating ducts/vents and cold air returns. This will help your equipment operate properly and add to your indoor comfort.
- 3. LOWER THE THERMOSTAT** Adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting. Start with a setting of 68 degrees.
- 4. MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE** Rather than turning up the thermostat setting, try a heated blanket to keep you cozy while seated.
- 5. ELIMINATE DRAFTS AND AIR LEAKS** Seal air leaks and drafts around windows and exterior doors. Kits are available for blocking air leaks from outlets and switch plates that are situated on exterior walls. Consult with a hardware store representative to determine the proper products.
- 6. CONSERVE WHILE COOKING** Bake multiple dishes simultaneously. For quick tasks, using a microwave or toaster oven will use significantly less energy than a large oven.
- 7. MAKE USE OF RESIDUAL HEAT** If you have multiple loads of laundry to dry, do them in quick succession, that way you’ll make use of residual heat from the prior load. You can also leave the oven door ajar when finished baking to allow residual heat into your living space.
- 8. UNPLUG WHEN POSSIBLE** Turn off unnecessary lights and electronics when not in use. Standby lights are telltale signs that electricity is slowly being consumed although the device is not in use. Turn off your home lights and check to see how many small standby lights remain lit. The only way to ensure that electricity is not being consumed is to unplug the device until needed. This works best, of course, with devices used infrequently.

If you rely on space heaters or heating tapes, make sure they are installed properly. Keep space heaters away from all flammable items. Place them in areas where they will not become a tripping hazard and never place the electric cord under a rug.



SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE! APPLY NOW.

LUCK OF THE DRAW SCHOLARSHIPS

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

PROGRAM DETAILS:

- Ten scholarships of \$1,000 will be awarded.
- The Luck of the Draw Scholarship drawing will be held Tuesday evening, March 26, 2024, 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 2024.
- 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 20, 2024, 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. 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 #1358101 and community involvement, work history, and an essay submission.

Applications are available online or from our office.
The application deadline is May 1, 2024, 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.

OPERATION ROUND UP®

WORKING TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Thank you for making 2023 another great year for our Operation Round Up® program. A total of \$22,480 was awarded in the 4th quarter to 31 applicants.

Member contributions of only a few cents each month are pooled together to fund various initiatives and improvements that strengthen the fabric of our local communities. Funding for this voluntary opt-out program comes from "rounding up" the participants' electric bills to the next whole dollar amount.

Applications are reviewed, and awards are made quarterly. Program guidelines and criteria are posted on www.fmec.coop. #1450200 The quarterly deadlines for 2024 are March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15. Applications are available at www.fmec.coop/operation-round or from our office.



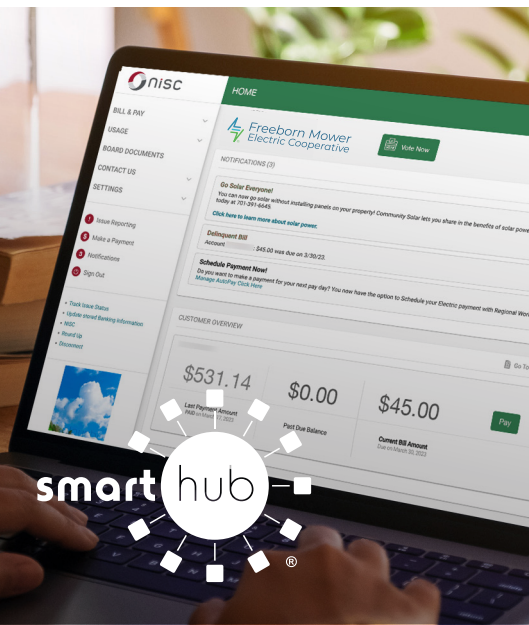
Remember, your donations are tax-deductible!

IMPROVED SMARTHUB

Manage your account with the new, improved SmartHub web application. It has a simplified design that puts your usage and payment details front and center for fast and easy access. The streamlined menu structure makes navigating the site a breeze.

Don't have a SmartHub account? It's free and easy to enroll! Register for SmartHub at www.fmec.coop or download the SmartHub mobile app from the App Store or Google Play.

- 1 **VIEW BILLS AND MAKE PAYMENTS**
- 2 **VIEW YOUR ELECTRIC USAGE HISTORY**
- 3 **REPORT AN OUTAGE**
- 4 **ENROLL IN AUTOPAY OR PAPERLESS BILLING**
- 5 **RECEIVE ACCOUNT NOTIFICATIONS**





THINKING ABOUT SOLAR?

As Minnesota and the nation continue to transition to renewable forms of energy, the home solar industry has been growing. “There have been advances in solar technology and equipment in recent times,” notes Bryan Skogheim, FMEC Director of Energy Solutions. “Tax credits and declining equipment costs create additional incentives for installing a solar energy system at your residence.”

If you are interested in residential solar, FMEC suggests the initial step is to get an energy audit and make any indicated basic energy efficiency upgrades. #353803 By first making your home as energy efficient as possible, you’ve reduced your overall energy demand. This decreases the size of solar system investment and will maximize the energy-saving returns.

Examine how you’ll use solar energy. Will you use it to generate electricity, heat water, or help heat your home? Is your location suitable for solar? Are there any restrictive covenants in your neighborhood or community?

“There are many solar resources available. The Minnesota Department of Commerce website has links to several sources of information,” adds Skogheim. “FMEC is also here to help. Before you invest, please contact our cooperative so we can review the interconnection that will be made with our distribution system. Additionally, research reputable installation companies, product warranties, and financing.”

LEARN MORE AT:
<https://mn.gov/commerce/energy/solar-wind/solar-for-homes/>

WHERE HAVE THEY GONE?

We need your help locating these former members.

Their Capital Credit checks for the 2023 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.

- ADEAN, Turner A
- ANDERSON, Kaitlyn L
- ANDRESEN, Nancee
- ASZMAN, David M
- BECKER, Darrell R
- BJORNSON, Rodney D
- BOLIN, Kristopher R
- BROWN, Courtney R
- BULEY, Donald
- BURKHART, Muriel M
- CRUZ, Jessica C
- DRINKWINE, Rocky J
- FREE, Amber N
- GOODWIN, Connor H
- HANSON, Debra
- HANSON, Kathy A
- JAIME, Janie
- JOHNSON, Malcolm
- KLEINSCHRODT, Matthew
- KRAHN, Cecelia
- KUBICEK, Richard D
- LERDO DE TEJADA, Juan A
- LOWE, Heather L
- MOTZKO, Joyce
- NELSON, Marilyn J
- NESJE, Cheri A
- NIELSON, John D
- O’NEIL, Molli A
- OVERLAND, David K
- SAKATA JV HOLDING LLC
- SEEGER, Rita A
- SEUASOUKSENG, Bouakhao
- SHEELY, Kasey K
- SNYDER, Daniel
- STAFFORD, Tanya M
- STEGENGA-REYNEN
- VALDEZ, Oziel
- WILHELM, Allen L
- WILLIAMSON, Nicholas L
- WINSOR, Brian K
- WITTMER, Karen J

PAYMENT OPTIONS REMINDER

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative offers several convenient payment and billing options, free of charge.



ONLINE PAYMENTS

View and pay bills through SmartHub, FMEC’s online account portal.



AUTOPAY

Have your bill automatically deducted from your checking, savings, or credit card.



PAY BY MAIL

Enclose your check or money order with the return stub from your bill and drop it in the mail to our PO Box.



PAY BY PHONE

Call (877) 487-9910 to make a payment over the phone 24/7 through our secure Audivate system.



PAY AT OUR OFFICE

Drop off your payment in our office lobby during business hours or 24/7 in our convenient drop box.

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:
2019 GATOR XUV 560. 220 hours. Call (507) 279-9761.

HOUSEHOLD:
CANNING JARS W/LIDS. Mostly Ball jars. Half pints & gallons, nice variety, some vintage. All clean. Call (507) 391-2861.

JANOME SEWING MACHINE. Model 525S. \$50. Call (507) 402-7800.

BLACK & DECKER AIR FRYER. Never used. Make offer. Cash only. Call (507) 334-2146.

MISCELLANEOUS:
GYMSHARK WORKOUT SKORTS. 1 size medium - gray. 1 size large - maroon. Perfect condition. \$5 each. Call (507) 460-8168.

TINGLEY OVERSHOES & WORK RUBBERS. 10” overshoes, new. Work rubbers w/cleated soles. Black, 9 ½ - 11. \$5 each. Call (507) 448-3491.

BLACKSTONE GRIDDLE HOOD. 22”, model #5011, new – still in the box. \$80. Call (507) 251-8964.

ANTIQUE WOODEN TOOL CHEST. 33” L x 11 ½” W x 16” HT. Some tools. Make offer. Call (507) 373-8151.

WARDS AIRLINE RADIO. 1930-1950 era, Model 14 BR-903A, 42” H x 26”. Manual included. \$50 cash. Call (507) 993-4221 or (507) 402-2217.

WANTED

RED WING CROCKS, BOWLS, BEATER JARS, JUGS. Call (507) 402-0880.

CAT 2 QUICK HITCH. Call (507) 383-1714.

INDOOR PLANT GROWING EQUIPMENT. Smaller size, lighted, plant growing/seed starter equipment. Call or text (507) 438-6469.

FREE

QUEEN MATTRESS. Call (507) 297-5531.

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.
- No business ads will be accepted. Ads must be submitted in writing or electronically, not by phone call.
- Ads will not be repeated.
- One ad/item per member, per month.

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.

USPS 209-540 ISSN 8755-9099

Periodicals Postage Paid at Albert Lea, MN and other locations.

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

SPOT 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



Office Hours:

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

Board Meetings:

Typically the last Tuesday of each month.

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

Put the power in your hands.



**CONTROL YOUR LIGHTS, LOCKS,
GARAGE DOOR, AND MORE
ALL FROM ONE APP.**

As part of a monitored security system, interactive services let you remotely adjust and monitor your system from your phone. Watch live or recorded video, disarm your system, and more.



SECURITY AUTOMATION VIDEO MEDICAL ALERTS
888.264.6380 heartlandss.com

LET'S COOK



BEEF SOUP

Submitted By: Sharon Hanson

- 1 lb. hamburger
- 1/2 C. each of celery and carrots, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 quart whole tomatoes
- 1 can undrained kidney beans
- 5 Tsp. beef bullion + 4 C. water
- 1/4 Tsp. parsley, oregano, basil, & pepper
- 2 C. cabbage cut up
- 1 C. green beans
- 1/2 C. macaroni

Directions:

Brown hamburger, drain, add all ingredients except cabbage, beans, & macaroni. Simmer 20 min. and then add the rest of the ingredients. Cook until tender, another 10 min. or so. It can be served with parmesan cheese.

Members may submit one short recipe per month by email at 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.