



**Freeborn  
Mower  
Electric  
Cooperative**

*People. Power. Possibilities.*

# county lines

## NEWSLETTER

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## NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

In the United States, we recognize many special occasions, such as National Ice Cream Month, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and Women’s History Month. Everywhere we turn, something seems deserving of recognition. National Co-op Month is no different for Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC), and there is indeed a lot to celebrate. Being part of a cooperative business model is unique, special, and something to take pride in. Cooperatives—whether in agriculture, finance, retail, or energy—operate differently, with a centralized focus on serving their members.

FMEC follows seven cooperative principles that prioritize the members’ best interests:



**Open and Voluntary Membership:** The cooperative is open to all people who can reasonably use its services and accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstance.



**Democratic Member Control:** Members participate in decision-making and policy-setting through the election of directors and trustees. Director elections are happening now, and member participation is highly encouraged.



**Member Economic Participation:** Members actively contribute to and democratically control the cooperative’s capital, ensuring the co-op stays true to prioritizing members’ needs and fostering growth through reinvestment.



**Autonomy and Independence:** The cooperative retains democratic control and its unique identity, even when entering agreements with other organizations or raising external capital.



**Cooperation Among Cooperatives:** Cooperatives support each other to achieve common goals, making the co-op community strong and unique.



**Education, Training, and Information:** The co-op invests in employee education through conferences, webinars, and other opportunities, reinforcing its commitment to cooperative principles.



**Open and Voluntary Membership:** The cooperative is open to all people who can reasonably use its services and accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstance.

Each of these principles guides FMEC in its mission to serve its members and strengthen the cooperative community.

## ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO



### ENERGY POLICY IN FOCUS: LEGISLATORS AND INDUSTRY EXPERTS MEET AT FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



A photo of the group that gathered for the Annual Legislative Day, held at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative on August 27, 2024.

It is always an honor for our board of directors to host area legislators, representatives from Minnesota Rural Electric Association, and Dairyland Power at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative for our annual Legislative Update meeting. The importance of sitting around the same table and discussing the energy issues that face the industry is both conversational and informative.

It's critical for lawmakers to understand the challenges rural electric cooperatives face as the energy industry continues to operate in a very volatile environment. Peggy Bennett (District 27A) shared, "It is extremely important to take a balanced approach to meet our present and future energy needs. As both sides of the isle work together toward a mutual goal of clean energy, we cannot forget the equally important goal of affordability, safety and reliability. It is necessary to utilize a "portfolio" of multiple energy sources, including wind, solar, natural gas, hydro, nuclear – and even clean coal for a time – to achieve these goals."

This collaborative conversation is an opportunity to ask one another questions and learn from experts in the industry and also serves to support our board of directors as they make key decisions which impact our cooperative. Our goal is always to provide safe and reliable electricity to our member-owners and part of ensuring this remains a top priority is working together cross-functionally so that the board can govern appropriately on behalf of our members.

As we recognize Cooperative Month, we welcome and celebrate our members' involvement. As a not-for-profit organization, Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative looks to serve its members best by staying in touch with current policies and voicing concerns with leaders who can advocate at the local and state levels.

## CAPITAL CREDITS RETIREMENT NOTICE

The Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) Board of Directors recently approved the 2024 general retirement (return) of Capital Credits in the amount of \$1,286,315. The excess revenue which is distributed back to members in the form of Capital Credits is how our members share in the financial success of the cooperative. FMEC is a member-owned, not-for-profit entity and the retirement of Capital Credits is a tangible demonstration of the "Cooperative Difference."

## member news

### RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC HEAT TAX EXEMPTION

Residential consumers using electricity as their primary heat source (50% or more) are exempt from sales tax for the billing months of November, December, January, February, March, and April.

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative requires a signed certificate stating that your primary source of heat is electricity. The purpose is: 1) It notifies FMEC to remove the sales tax from your bill for the qualifying months. 2) Should FMEC be audited by the Department of Revenue, FMEC would utilize the exemption certificate signed by you as our authority to remove the sales tax. This is for the protection of the cooperative. If FMEC were audited and it was found that the consumer's bill was illegally exempted, it would be the responsibility of the individual consumer to pay any amount due, plus penalties.

If this tax exemption applies to you, please submit a completed certification form to FMEC. The certificate is available from our office or can be downloaded from our website: [www.fmec.coop](http://www.fmec.coop). The downloadable form can be found under the **SERVICES** tab, Forms, Downloadable Information, Exemption Forms.

If you have previously submitted a form, there's no need to submit a new form. However, if you are no longer exempt from sales tax, please contact our office.

Separately metered electric heat does not require the completion of this form. Your electric heat usage is already exempt under that agreement.

## SHAPING OUR FUTURE: 2025 DIRECTOR ELECTIONS AT FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Throughout our history at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, we have never strayed from our commitment to serve our member-owners. #666801 We do not take this responsibility lightly and part of ensuring we continue to operate with our members' best interests in mind is through the governance of our board of directors. Directors elected from and by our cooperative membership provide the policy direction for FMEC.

### 2025 DIRECTOR ELECTION INFORMATION

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is governed by nine directors who are member-owners of the cooperative. Elections are held in three different districts each year. Board members are elected by the membership and serve a three-year term. Directors meet monthly at the cooperative headquarters, typically on the last Tuesday of each month.

Applications are now being accepted for interested members in District 2, District 5, and District 8.

- **District 2:** Represents the Lerdal, Hollandale, Geneva, Maple Island, Corning, Moscow, and Oakland areas.
- **District 5:** Represents areas east of Hayward, Gordonsville, Myrtle, London, Lyle, Rose Creek, and Johnsburg.
- **District 8:** Represents the areas in the south part of the city of Albert Lea.

If you are a member of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative who lives in one of the districts up for election and would like to run for the position of FMEC director, please contact our office for an information packet. Applications are due in our office by 3:30 p.m. on December 10, 2024.

- Board members must attend monthly board meetings and other special meetings as they are called.
- They are responsible for the adoption of policies, to assure the democratic functioning of the cooperative in accordance with the Bylaws, and respect the confidentiality of information provided, among many other duties.

**Any member meeting the Bylaw Qualifications who has a desire to become a director of the cooperative, may apply for an open board position. This includes minorities, women, and individuals with a disability.**

*Recordatorio: Cualquier miembro que cumpla con los requisitos de los reglamentos internos y que tenga interes en ser director/a de la cooperative puede aplicar para puestos vacantes en la mesa directiva. Esto incluye miembros de grupos que son minorias, mujeres, y personas con discapacidades.*



## POWERING UP SECURITY: FMEC'S STRATEGY TO PROTECT DATA AND THE GRID

*Cooperation among Cooperatives, which is one of the Seven Cooperative Principles, can also be seen in how Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative navigates cybersecurity risks. Co-ops, including FMEC, often collaborate with other cooperatives by sharing cybersecurity best practices and working alongside industry experts and the government.*

At FMEC, we have two very important jobs concerning cybersecurity; protecting our members' personal information and doing our part to protect the grid from natural and manmade threats so that we can continue to deliver reliable power. Both of these jobs involve planning, strategy, and collaborative working sessions with North American Electric Reliability Corporation, federal agencies, and local law enforcement to navigate potential threats and expose the vulnerabilities of the electric grid.

Unfortunately, cyber-attacks are becoming increasingly more prevalent and complicated and cost organizations billions of dollars every year to remedy. This is why our aim is to not only harden our equipment but put every effort into helping our employees recognize the many different ways that criminals could attempt to gain access to our information systems.

At Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, our employees and board of directors are required to complete cybersecurity training on a quarterly basis and are tested on a regular basis with simulated phishing attempts. #666801 As cyber criminals continually deploy new tactics, we make it our practice to continually train our employees to "stop and think" before clicking on anything that appears suspicious.

Something that might seem as simple as "unsubscribe" to an unwanted email could be a recipe for disaster if that link is associated with malware. Equipping our employees with the right tools to navigate a complex cyber environment is part of how FMEC safeguards against potential threats.



## 5 THINGS THAT FMEC DOES TO PROTECT YOUR INFORMATION:



### ROBUST SECURITY PROCEDURES

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative uses industry-standard firewalls, encryption, and password protection to safeguard business information.



### EMPLOYEE ACCESS LIMITATION

Employee access and member information is limited to those with a business reason for knowing the information and are educated on the importance of confidentiality.



### INFORMATION COLLECTION, USE, AND RETENTION

FMEC collects, uses, and retains member information only when necessary and with the member's permission.



### RESTRICTIONS ON INFORMATION SHARING

FMEC does not share specific member account information or other personally identifiable data with unaffiliated third parties, except under certain exceptions such as completing a transaction requested by the member or as required by law.



### IDENTITY THEFT PROTECTION PROGRAM

FMEC has a comprehensive Identity Theft Prevention Program, including employee training, account monitoring for fraudulent activities, and stringent identity verification processes. These measures help detect and prevent identity theft efficiently.



Life is fast, and it can be hectic, but it doesn't have to be complicated. Paying your electric bill shouldn't be a complex task, and with our free SmartHub web portal and mobile app, it won't be.

SmartHub offers features that make managing your account easy. Whether on the web, your smartphone, or tablet (Android or iOS), you can pay your bill, view usage, report an outage, and get the latest news.

Once logged in, you can view your billing history and make a payment with just a few clicks or taps on the app. You'll also be able to see your current and past bills, compare costs, and track usage trends to help lower your bill.

Payments through SmartHub are fast and easy. #104402 You can securely store your payment information for future transactions, view and pay on multiple accounts, and schedule payments.

Reporting an outage or service issue is quick and simple with the SmartHub mobile app. Just a few taps, and you can let us know about the issue or contact FMEC for customer service.

SmartHub is free to download for Apple/iOS and Android, powered by the National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC).

### SIGN UP FOR SMARTHUB

Register and login to SmartHub at [www.fmec.coop](http://www.fmec.coop) or download the free SmartHub mobile app from the Apple 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



### JOIN US! OCTOBER 15 | 7-11 A.M.

Together, let's say YES to coffee and NO to paper! Moving to paperless billing will help us reduce our overhead costs while also being good stewards of our environment.

The Carpenter Coffee Company mobile trailer will be parked in Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative's parking lot on Tuesday, October 15 from 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. We invite you to join us that day to purchase a coffee, latte, smoothie, or beverage of your choice.

Our Conference Center will be open so you can enjoy your beverage, visit with us, ask questions, or share your thoughts.

In addition, members will have the opportunity to sign up for paperless billing. As a token of our appreciation, members who choose to switch to paperless billing will receive a \$5 bill credit, which will be reflected on their next electric bill, and a \$1 off coupon to be used for a tasty beverage from the Carpenter Coffee Company mobile trailer on October 15.





## 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 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 15<sup>th</sup> of the current month to claim your \$25 bill credit.

Congratulations to Dennis Hanson!  
He spotted his account number in the September newsletter.



### FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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(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.*



## 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.

## LET'S COOK



### CUCUMBER PASTA SALAD

Submitted By: Helen Johnson

- 1 lb. angel hair pasta
- 1 C. half & half cream
- 15 oz. Marzetti's Original Salad Dressing
- 2 cucumbers (sliced)
- 1 Tbsp. dillweed
- 1 Tsp. celery salt
- ½ onion (chopped)

#### Directions:

Mix together and let stand for 2 hours in the refrigerator before serving.

*Members may submit one short recipe per month by email to [michelle.rayman@fmec.coop](mailto: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.*