



**Freeborn
Mower
Electric
Cooperative**

People. Power. Possibilities.

county lines

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026 • VOLUME 87 • NO. 01



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS STRENGTHEN RELIABILITY IN 2025–2026

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) continued to make significant progress in strengthening system reliability and improving long-term service performance throughout 2025, with several major initiatives successfully completed. These projects reflect our ongoing commitment to providing safe, dependable electricity to the communities we serve while modernizing our infrastructure for future needs.

One of the most impactful milestones of 2025 was the completion of the Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperative acquisition load cutover to Dairyland Power on August 1. This achievement marked the conclusion of a ten-year effort and allowed FMEC to streamline operations by retiring five older substations and consolidating service under a single power provider. The transition not only simplifies system management but also positions FMEC to operate more efficiently as demand continues to evolve.

Al Stadheim, Director of Operations, added, “Combining the two distribution systems into one began immediately after the acquisition in 2015. It was a complex undertaking that involved everyone at the co-op and had to be completed within the ten-year timeframe. I am extremely pleased with the commitment to enhancing reliability and service to our members shown by our cooperative staff throughout this process.”

In addition to this major operational shift, significant improvements were made through the rebuilding of more than 30 miles of aging overhead distribution line. #291001 By converting these segments to underground construction, FMEC has reduced exposure to weather-related outages and improved overall service reliability for thousands of members across the service area.

Another key accomplishment was the completion of a new tie line serving the City of Oakland and the surrounding rural region. This connection adds valuable operational flexibility, allowing power to be rerouted more effectively during outages or maintenance events.

Looking ahead to 2026, FMEC has several important projects planned. Construction will begin on a one-mile tie line to support the City of Adams and a three-mile tie line to boost reliability for the City of Alden. Crews will also undertake a significant infrastructure upgrade in southeastern Mower County by rebuilding four miles of existing overhead lines and installing five miles of new underground lines. This work will enhance reliability and establish a new tie line to serve the City of Leroy better.

Building a stronger and more resilient distribution system will remain a top priority for FMEC in 2026, as we continue to prioritize providing reliable service to our members.

ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO



REFLECTING ON PROGRESS AND PREPARING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

2025 was a transformative year for the cooperative, marked by our shared achievements and the meaningful impact we made in the communities we serve. We contributed not only financially, but also through dedicated volunteer time, efforts that continue to make me proud.

In the first three quarters of 2025, our Operation Round Up Program awarded over \$80,994.72 to organizations, schools, and community programs that are making a significant difference in the lives of those we serve. This generosity is made possible solely through our members, who contribute just a few dollars a year by rounding up their bills to the nearest whole dollar. Collectively, the impact is remarkable, and we are honored to facilitate this program.

Additionally, 2025 was a strong financial year for the co-op, as we successfully met our approved budget. Achieving this amid

rising costs is no small task, but our team remains dedicated to fiscal responsibility and to strategically managing the expenses associated with our daily operations.

We anticipate 2026 to be another exceptional year, with many initiatives from our strategic plan set to begin. #229202 Our focus will remain on safety and reliability, while continuing to make a positive difference in the communities we serve. We are deeply grateful for our staff, who work tirelessly to keep daily operations running smoothly, and for our lineworkers, who give every effort to keep your lives powered.

I look forward to 2026 and all that we will accomplish together, with your continued support.

Sincerely,
Jim Krueger

SAVE BIG IN 2026
WITH ENERGY
EFFICIENCY
REBATES!

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is excited to offer a wide range of rebates in 2026 to help members save money while making energy-efficient upgrades to their homes, farms, and businesses.

These rebates are designed to encourage the adoption of energy-saving technologies and reduce overall energy consumption in our community. Here are just a few examples of the rebates available in 2026:

- Appliances:** Rebates for ENERGY STAR® certified refrigerators, freezers, washers, and dryers.
- Heating and Cooling:** Rebates for energy-efficient heat pumps,

- water heaters, and central air conditioners.
- Agricultural Equipment:** Incentives for variable-speed drives, livestock fans, and energy-efficient lighting.
- Smart Energy Solutions:** Rebates for programmable thermostats and electric vehicle chargers.

To see a complete list of 2026 rebates, eligibility requirements, and application details, visit our website at www.fmec.coop/rebates. Take advantage of these savings and improve the energy efficiency of your space. Let's work together to make 2026 a year of energy-smart choices!

member news

OFFICE CLOSED:

Monday, February 19th
Staff Development

PRIVACY NOTICE

As a member of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, you trust us with certain personal information. We value your trust and take it very seriously. The cooperative has and enforces a Privacy Policy that is reviewed periodically to ensure that it meets current standards and that your information remains secure.

The Privacy Notice and Disclosure Statement is included with your January billing statement. Those members utilizing paperless billing will be provided with a link to this information.

Please contact the cooperative to make changes to your personal and/or contact information that is on file. Call (507) 373-6421.

PUBLIC PHOTOS POLICY

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative reserves the right to photograph or video participants in cooperative programs and special events. The cooperative may choose to use these images in print, on its website, or in any other communication materials. No person may use or reproduce these images for any purpose without prior authorization and express written permission from the cooperative board of directors.

HOLIDAY FUN RECAP

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

On December 11, we hosted a Holiday Open House in our lobby area to celebrate the season with #2081200 our valued members. We always appreciate the opportunity to connect with everyone who visits and to see our members dressed in their most festive apparel!



SANTA CRUISE

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative participated in the Santa Cruise, which was part of the Holiday Bazaar held in downtown Albert Lea on December 11. We were excited to have good weather this year, and we appreciate the joy this event brings to the Albert Lea community each holiday season.





RURAL ELECTRIC YOUTH TOUR 2026

An All-Expenses Paid Trip to Washington D.C. Open to High School Juniors and/or Seniors!

Rural Electric Youth Tour
June 15-20, 2026



APPLY NOW!

Are you a junior or senior in high school? Don't miss out on the experience of a lifetime! Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is honored to sponsor two high school students from our service area to participate in the National Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. This all-expenses-paid trip will take place from June 15-20, 2026. Over 1,900 students from across the country come together for a week in the nation's capital to tour national monuments, meet with legislators, develop valuable leadership skills, and build lifelong friendships. Previous participants have returned with incredible stories and insights about how the trip positively impacted their educational journey. You don't want to miss this opportunity to apply!

The deadline to apply is Friday, February 13, 2026, at 3:30 p.m. The student interview process will begin on Monday, March 16, 2026, at 3:30 p.m.

To request an application packet or for more details, please contact your high school counselor or visit our office at 3366 Bridge Ave., Albert Lea, MN. You can also find Youth Tour information and an informative video highlighting a past trip on www.fmec.coop.

For any questions, feel free to reach out to Lori Jimenez at (507) 379-8852 or via email at lori.jimenez@fmec.coop.



PAST TOUR HIGHLIGHTS HAVE INCLUDED:

- Arlington Cemetery
- Holocaust Memorial Museum
- John F. Kennedy Center
- U.S. Capitol
- Potomac River
- Smithsonian Institution
- 911 Pentagon Memorial
- Lincoln Memorial
- WWII Memorial
- Mount Vernon
- Martin Luther King Memorial
- Korean War Veteran's Memorial
- Iwo Jima Memorial
- Museum of Natural History
- Jefferson Memorial
- Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial
- Washington Monument
- Social Events
- Legislator Visits
- Cooperative Learning Sessions



CO-OP PRINCIPLE #2: DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

DIRECTOR NOMINEE UPDATE

At the time of print, the following members have applied for directorship:

District 3

Steve Garisch (Incumbent)

District 6

Matt Maras (Incumbent)

District 9

Larry Irvine (Incumbent)
Richard Connely

POST FILING DEADLINE FOR NOMINATION BY PETITION

After the January filing deadline has expired, persons may still be nominated by filing a petition form that is available from the FMEC office. To become a nominee by petition requires fifteen (15) members from the district in which the election is being held to sign in support of a particular nominee on the petition form. The petition form must be submitted to the cooperative office by 3:30 p.m. on Monday, February 16, 2026.

WHEN THERE IS A SINGLE NOMINEE

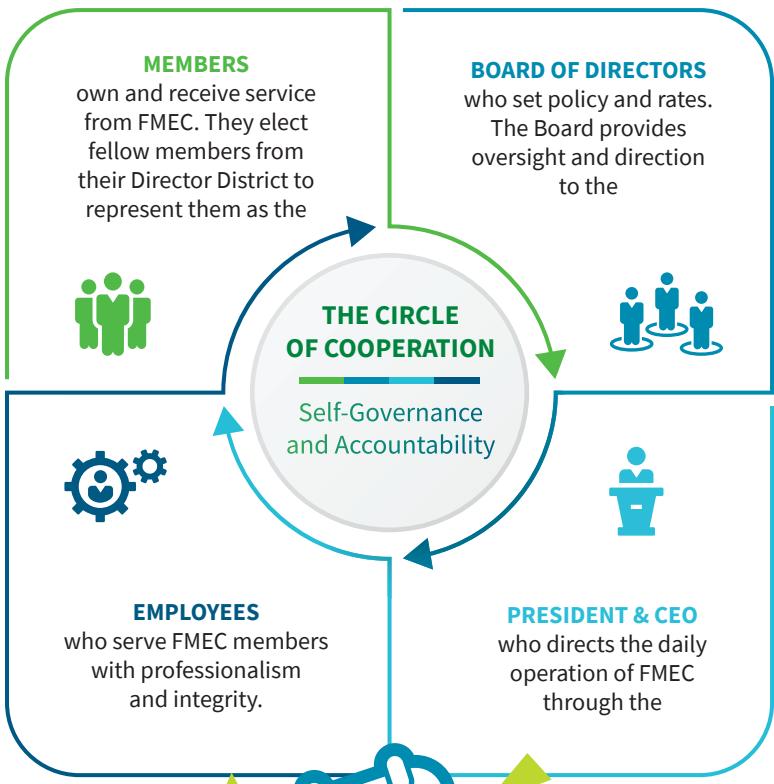
Should there be only one nominee come forward in the district by the Nominee by Petition deadline, that applicant will be deemed elected as Director.

WHEN THERE ARE MULTIPLE NOMINEES

Should multiple names be filed in a particular district, a biography of each applicant will be sent to all members of the district on Monday, March 2, 2026. Returned ballots are due on Thursday, March 19, 2026. Ballots must be returned in the provided envelope to the third-party balloting company and not to our cooperative. Allow for possible mail delays.

DIRECTORS BEGIN TERM

The elected directors will be seated during the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 2026.



We hope that you are able to join us for this once-a-year event!

FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING

TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 21, 2026

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

We look forward to seeing you there!

HONORING SERVICE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

FMEC PROUDLY CELEBRATES THE RETIREMENT OF TWO VALUED TEAM MEMBERS



MICHELLE RAYMAN "MICKI"

Micki joined Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative in 2013 and retired from her position as Marketing and Events Coordinator on January 2, 2026, after nearly 13 years of dedicated service. She has been married to her husband, Jeff, for 43 years and has two children and one grandchild. In retirement, Micki looks forward to crafting, spending more time outdoors, and enjoying her cabin up north.

During her tenure at the cooperative, Micki was a part of several significant changes, including the acquisition of the Alliant territory, navigating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and relocating to a new building following the pandemic.

She was particularly known for her unmatched attention to detail, exceptional organizational skills, and her ability to plan events with intentionality, ensuring that both members and employees always had a positive experience. Oh, and we can't forget her sparkly sense of fashion and love for the Minnesota Vikings.

We wish Micki all the best in her retirement and are grateful for her many contributions to the cooperative.



PAM WASMOEN

Pam began her career with FMEC in June of 1991. On January 2, 2026, she will officially retire into a well-earned retirement after 34 years. She has supported numerous teams, but her impact in Operations stands out the most. She helped guide the Outage Management System through major upgrades, supported the move to smart meters, and became a trusted source of knowledge as maps and processes shifted to digital. Her calm, steady presence has helped staff and members through storms, outages, and countless changes.

Now she's looking forward to unplanned adventures, short trips, time with friends and family and enjoying quiet winter days at home. #2081200 She is excited to spend more time reading, gardening, and baking—something many of us are happy to help sample. Pam shared that leaving the cooperative is bittersweet because of the friendships she's built here.

We are grateful for her many years of service and wish her the very best in this next chapter.

HEADING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER? DON'T FORGET TO PREP YOUR HOME BEFORE YOU GO!



Many Minnesotans escape to warmer climates during the cold winter months, but it's easy to overlook some simple steps that can help lower your energy use, and your utility bills while you're away.

- **Lower your water heater temperature.** If no one will be using hot water, turn your water heater to vacation mode or lower the temperature to reduce energy use.
- **Unplug electronics and appliances.** TVs, computers, chargers, and small kitchen appliances continue to draw power even when not in use. Unplugging them can help cut unnecessary energy costs.
- **Check doors and windows.** Make sure all windows and doors are properly closed and locked. Sealing drafts before you leave helps maintain indoor temperatures and reduces heat loss.
- **Protect your plumbing.** Open cabinet doors under sinks to allow warm air to circulate around pipes, especially

along exterior walls. If extremely cold weather is forecast, consider leaving faucets dripping slightly.

- **Set lights on timers.** Using timers or smart plugs for a few lights can give the appearance that someone is home while avoiding lights being left on continuously.
- **Arrange for home check-ins.** Ask a trusted neighbor, friend, or family member to stop by periodically to ensure everything is working properly and to watch for issues like power outages or unusual temperature drops.
- **Monitor remotely if possible.** #229202 Smart thermostats, security systems, or water-leak detectors allow you to monitor your home and receive alerts while you're away, providing added peace of mind.

A little preparation goes a long way toward protecting your home and saving money while you enjoy the warmer weather.

CLASSIFIED marketplace

FOR SALE

VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:
2002 GMC 2500 6.0 PICKUP. 120,000 miles. \$7,500. Call (507) 383-7269.

VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:
1990 340 POLARIS SNOWMOBILE. New skis, seat, paint, and gas tank. Call (507) 438-5607.

2007 350 FORD HANDICAP VAN. Less than 30k miles. Make offer. Call (507) 491-2022.

FREE

ARIENS 920 SERIES SNOW BLOWER. Electric/pull start, 2 stages. Self-propelled. Six forward/two reverse. Call (507) 377-6191.

FARM:
1,500 GALLON POLY TANK WITH PUMP & HOSES ON JD 1075 GEAR. \$4,000. Call (507) 460-0248.

HOUSEHOLD:
HOOVER UPRIGHT VACUUM CLEANER. Bagless with retractable cord. Nearly new. \$45. Call (507) 567-2700.

ROLL-AWAY BED. Call (507) 261-8174.

Classified Marketplace ads are printed in our monthly **County Lines** newsletter **FREE OF CHARGE** to our current members. You can review the Classified Marketplace Rules and/or submit an ad at www.fmeccoop.com. Select **MY COOPERATIVE**. Click on **NEWSLETTER** under **NEWS & INFO** tab. You may also email ads to info@fmeccoop.com or send by mail to County Lines, PO Box 611, Albert Lea MN 56007. One ad/item per member. Ads will not be accepted over the phone. Ads will not be repeated.

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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



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

Kiosk, Available 6:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

7 Days a Week

Board Meetings:

Typically the last Tuesday of each month.

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



Be Aware of the Silent Danger.

Carbon Monoxide detectors added to your security system provide early warning. You'll receive instant alerts on your phone, and responders will be notified immediately.



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LET'S COOK



KISS COOKIES

Submitted By: Kelly Braund

- 1 - 14 oz. sweetened condensed milk
- 3/4 C. peanut butter
- 1 Tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 C. biscuit/Bisquick baking mix
- Optional candy on top, Kisses or Reese's peanut butter cups

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Mix the sweetened condensed milk, peanut butter, and vanilla extract until smooth. Add baking mix and mix well. Shape into 1-inch balls and place 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking pan. Flatten with a fork or leave in a ball. Bake 6 to 8 minutes and press candies immediately onto cookies after baking.

Members may submit one short recipe per month by email to info@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.