



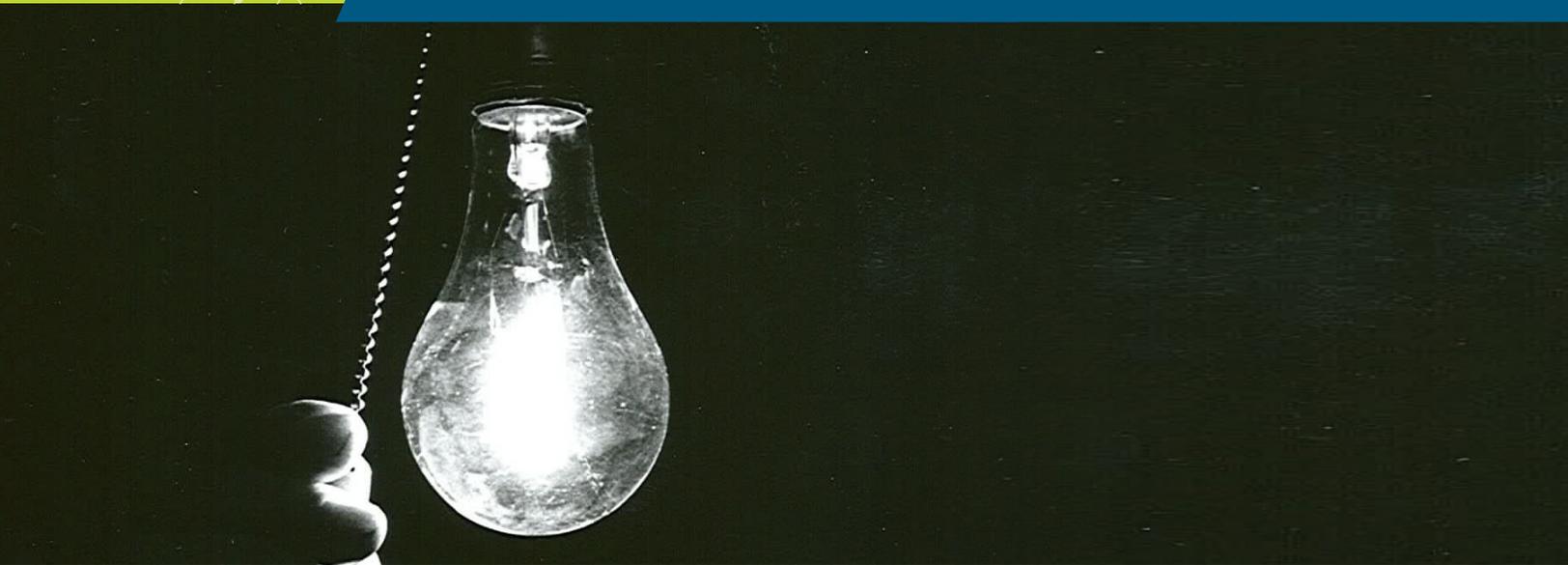
Freeborn
Mower
Electric
Cooperative

People. Power. Possibilities.

county lines

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026 • VOLUME 87 • NO. 03



THE POWER OF US: RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

Rural electrification is one of the clearest examples of what “The Power of Us” truly means. It wasn’t driven by convenience or profit alone; it was driven by people deciding that no one should be excluded simply because they lived farther apart.

Before rural electrification, farms and small towns relied on kerosene lamps, wood stoves, and manual labor. Workdays were longer, food storage was less safe, and access to information lagged behind larger cities. Private utilities largely avoided rural areas because the distances were long and the return on investment was low. Individually, rural families didn’t have the resources to bring electricity to their homes. But together, through unity and cooperation, they could accomplish what none of them could do alone.

That’s where cooperation changed everything.

Through shared vision, community organization, and collective investment, rural electric cooperatives were formed. Neighbors became members. Members became owners. Poles went up not because it was easy, but because people believed that shared effort could create

shared opportunity. Electricity didn’t just power lights, it powered progress.

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative member Marian Trytten remembers this transformation vividly. In a journal entry dated October 23, 1946, she recalled the first time “electric pole men” arrived at her family’s home. She wrote, “I remember before we had electricity. #399202 We had a gas lamp which hung from the ceiling in the kitchen. After supper and the dishes, grandma would carry the gas lamp from the kitchen to the dining room, where it hung on a hook near the buffet.”

Then, on January 28, 1947, while she was in the fourth grade, Marian recorded the moment electricity finally came to life. “I could hardly wait to get home and turn on the lights,” she wrote. “I came running into the house, through the entry, and up the steps to the light switch. I flipped it, and nothing happened. I almost cried—partly because I was so eager and full of anticipation. Well, it made a funny little tinkle sound, and on came the fluorescent light in the kitchen.”

Continued on page 4.

ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF WINTER STORM FERN

Winter Storm Fern unleashed cold weather and heavy snow across most of the Midwest and East Coast at the end of January. In our region, below-normal low temperatures, coupled with unplanned power plant outages (due to weather or maintenance) and low wind generation, strained grid reliability for the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO).

Reduced power supply meant higher energy and natural gas prices as more expensive generation units were called upon by the MISO to meet the region's electricity demands. As this occurred, our wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power Cooperative, was unable to utilize one of its primary "baseload" power plants due to an unplanned maintenance outage. Baseload refers to a facility that can operate consistently and, when needed, bring stability to the grid.

Baseload plants are most commonly powered by coal, natural gas, or nuclear energy, while intermittent generating resources, like wind and solar, may only be available at certain times (when the sun shines and the wind blows). This forced Dairyland to purchase power at higher prices than budgeted from the regional power

market (MISO). As a result, actual wholesale power costs for January were considerably higher than forecasted.

This is never an ideal scenario, and it's important for our members to understand that when our power supplier is forced to buy power at a higher cost, it will subsequently impact our cooperative. We have been working with DPC, finance team, and our board of directors to understand the financial impact to our members. Please see page 5 for more details.

We assure you that grid reliability continues to be a top priority for us, our peers, and industry partners, and this unexpected event underscores the continued need for advocacy in support of reliable baseload power generation sources to meet increasing energy demands.

We invite you to join us at our next Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at Albert Lea High School to hear about a recap of 2025 and a look ahead to 2026 at FMEC.

Sincerely,
Jim Krueger

UPDATE: DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

As of 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, the final filing date for directorship by petition, the following members have filed for directorship.

- District 3**
Steve Garbisch (Incumbent)
Eric Tupy
- District 6**
Matt Maras (Incumbent)
Joe Pacovsky
- District 9**
Larry Irvine (Incumbent)
Richard Connelly

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. #1357701 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.

Elected directors will be seated during the upcoming annual meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 2026.

member news

COLD WEATHER RULE ENDS APRIL 30

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule can protect residential utility customers from having electric service shut off between October 1 and April 30.

If your account is past due, you are no longer protected under the Cold Weather Rule after April 30. If you need to make payment arrangements on your account, please contact our office during regular business hours.

OFFICIAL SECRETARY'S NOTICE

89th Annual Meeting of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative

Notice is hereby given that the annual business meeting of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative will be held on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, 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.

Frank Fryer, Secretary

T-SHIRT DESIGN WINNER

Congratulations to William Tudor for entering and winning FMEC's Annual Meeting T-Shirt Contest! This submission received the most votes on our Facebook page, and the design will be featured on our Annual Meeting T-shirts, which will be worn by our employees that evening. Thank you to all who participated!



FINANCING AND REBATES TO HELP YOU SAVE IN 2026

One of the many benefits of being a member of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) is access to programs designed to help you save money. FMEC offers several rebate and financing opportunities to make energy-efficient upgrades more affordable for our members.

If your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment is outdated or struggling to keep up during peak winter or summer months, upgrading can feel overwhelming due to the cost. #1516807 The good news? FMEC members have access to Beneficial Electrification Financing, a low-interest loan program designed to ease the financial burden of home improvements.

Members can apply for financing between \$1,000 and \$7,500, with repayment terms ranging from two to five years. Even better, the monthly loan payment is conveniently added to your regular electric bill, no separate payment required.

This financing can be used for a wide range of energy-efficient upgrades, including:

- HVAC equipment
- Electric water heating equipment
- Insulation, windows, and doors
- Permanent standby generators
- Whole-house battery backup systems
- Electric vehicle charging equipment
- ENERGY STAR® appliances

Getting started is easy. Simply call our office at (507) 373-6421, and one of our Energy Solutions Specialists will be happy to walk you through the process and answer any questions.

Another great way to save is through FMEC's rebate programs, which offer money back on qualifying ENERGY STAR® appliances, water heaters, heating, lighting, air conditioning equipment, and more. Rebate applications must be submitted within three months of purchase, and equipment must be installed on FMEC lines.

All 2026 rebate applications must be submitted by December 31, 2026. Funds are limited, so members are encouraged to apply early. For full details on financing and rebate opportunities, visit our website at www.fmec.coop.

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION CONTINUED...

The impact was immediate and lasting. Electricity not only transformed daily life, it helped shape a family legacy rooted in service and cooperation. After graduating in 1948, Marian's sister Clarice began working at People's Gas and Electric in Northwood, IA, reflecting the growing opportunities rural electrification made possible.

Years later, Marian's daughter, Mary Nelson, would carry that legacy forward. Mary began her career at what was then Freeborn Mower Cooperative Services, where she developed a deep understanding of the cooperative model and the importance of member-focused service. Over nearly 30 years, Mary became a trusted advocate for members, helping strengthen relationships between the cooperative and the communities it serves. #1357701 As Director of Cooperative Relations at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, she played a key role in member communication, education, and engagement, ensuring that the cooperative remained not just a utility but a trusted partner in the lives of its members.

Rural electrification proved that progress doesn't happen in isolation. It happens when people invest in one another, share responsibility, and work toward a common goal. From the first poles set in the ground to decades of dedicated service by cooperative employees and members, the success of rural electrification has always depended on people.

Today, "The Power of Us" is more than a phrase; it is a commitment. A commitment to cooperation that makes communities stronger. And that the same spirit that once brought light to rural homes continues to guide the work of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative as they seek to serve their members by providing safe, reliable power to their lives.



Mary Nelson with mother, Marian Trytten

CELEBRATING MARY NELSON AND HER LASTING IMPACT AT FMEC



After 30 years with Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC), Mary Nelson, Director of Cooperative Relations, is officially entering a new season to focus on family, travel, and cherished time with her granddaughters. Mary has undoubtedly left a lasting and positive impact on the cooperative world and has been a strong, trusted leader and advocate for many, particularly in the area of communications.

Throughout her career, Mary was regarded as a true professional among professionals. She had a rare ability to make meaningful connections with people, ensuring that everyone she interacted with felt welcomed, heard, and genuinely cared for. Her thoughtful approach, exceptional attention to detail, and solutions-focused mindset made her a respected voice at FMEC and in the cooperative community.

Whether navigating complex challenges, strengthening member and community relationships, or mentoring colleagues, she consistently led with integrity, compassion, and purpose. Her commitment to excellence set a standard that will continue to guide the cooperative well into the future.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Mary will be remembered for the kindness, encouragement, and authenticity she brought to her role each day, as well as for the occasional rock music blaring from her office (If you know, you know!). She leaves behind a legacy of service, dedication, and heart, and every one of us is better because of it. While Mary will be deeply missed, we are grateful for her many years of service and dedication and wish her all the best in this next chapter.

Navigating Challenges of Winter Storm Fern

In late January, Winter Storm Fern affected the Midwest and East Coast, causing below-normal temperatures, power plant outages, and reduced wind generation, which stressed the electricity grid managed by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO).

In response to these challenges, energy and natural gas prices rose, leading MISO to rely on more expensive sources to meet electricity demand. Dairyland Power Cooperative faced difficulties due to an unplanned maintenance outage at a key baseload plant, which is vital to grid stability.

In light of this situation, there will be an increase in the power cost adjustment on our members' electric bills beginning in late February. This adjustment will be implemented over a four-month period. It's important to note that Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative and Dairyland Power Cooperative are also absorbing a portion of these costs.

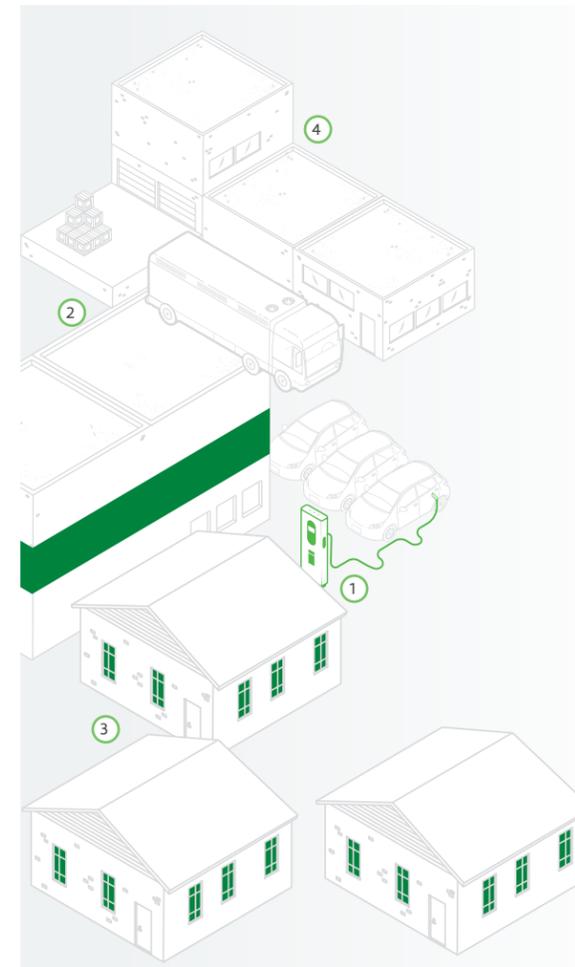
We are committed to minimizing the impact on our members while ensuring the reliability and sustainability of our power supply. For additional information on power cost adjustments, scan the QR code, which directs you to our website.

SCAN HERE



Why is the Demand for Electricity Rising?

Demand for electricity in the U.S. is booming. Recent data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (enough to power more than 30 million homes) between now and 2028. #1516807 Meeting this new demand will require a combination of new power plants, grid upgrades and energy storage technology advancements. Here are the key factors that are driving increased demand:



- 1 Increased Electrification:** Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are increasing overall U.S. energy consumption.
- 2 Data Centers:** Driven by explosions in AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.
- 3 Economic Growth:** Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.
- 4 Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring:** New, expanding and "onshored/reshored" manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 GWh per year.



CHARGING AHEAD SAFELY: A GUIDE TO LITHIUM BATTERY FIRE PREVENTION

Lithium-ion batteries power many of the devices we rely on every day, from smartphones and laptops to power tools, electric bikes, and yard equipment. While these batteries are efficient and reliable, proper use and storage are critical to reducing the risk of fires and ensuring safety in homes and workplaces.

Here is a list of important safety practices to help keep you and your home safe:

- Use only manufacturer-approved chargers and equipment.
- Avoid using incompatible or damaged chargers that can cause batteries to overheat, increasing the risk of fire.
- Avoid charging devices on soft surfaces like beds, couches, or piles of clothing, which can trap heat. Instead, place devices on hard, nonflammable surfaces and never charge them unattended or overnight.
- Stop charging once fully charged.
- Look for physical damage. Lithium batteries that are dropped, crushed, punctured, or exposed to water can fail internally, sometimes hours or days later.
- If a battery shows signs of swelling, leaking, excessive heat, strange odors, or unusual noises, stop using it immediately and move it to a safe, nonflammable area away from people and structures.

Proper storage also plays a key role in fire prevention. Store batteries in cool, dry locations, away from direct sunlight and heat sources. Do not store lithium batteries in garages, vehicles, or near furnaces where temperatures can fluctuate significantly. Keep spare batteries away from metal objects that could short-circuit the terminals.

Finally, proper disposal matters. Lithium batteries should never be thrown in the trash or recycling bin. Instead, take them to approved battery recycling or hazardous waste collection sites. By following these safety #399202 guidelines, proper charging, careful handling, safe storage, and responsible disposal, lithium batteries can be used safely and effectively while minimizing the risk of fires.

Lithium-ion batteries power the devices we use every day, but safe charging, storage, and disposal are essential to preventing fires and protecting your home.

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VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:
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HOUSEHOLD:
1951 SINGER PORTABLE ELECTRIC SEWING MACHINE. Model 128-23. Has attachments. \$50. Call (507) 271-7480.

WANTED

PARSONS JACK RUSSELL TERRIER. Call (507) 567-2150.

CLEAN USED OIL. Call (507) 438-0630.

BARN PULLEYS & TROLLEYS. Call (507) 402-0880.

FREE

INVERSION TABLE. With back release. Call (507) 318-0042.

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 info@fmec.coop or go to the website, use the instructions above, and click on the **NEWSLETTER** tab to electronically submit an ad.

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.



AVOID UTILITY SCAMS

Scammers will threaten you with everything from shutting off power to your home to legal action. Don't fall victim to these types of scams.

- Never give personal information to an unknown caller or visitor. Our representatives have access to the details they need to service your account.
- Demands for immediate payment by wire transfer, cryptocurrency, gift cards, or cash reload cards should immediately raise red flags.
- If you think you've been contacted by a scammer falsely representing the co-op, please let us know as soon as possible.

LET'S COOK



SCALLOPED CORN

Submitted By:
Kristen Flaherty

- 2 cans of cream-style corn
- 3 eggs
- 1/3 cup of oil
- 1 box Jiffy corn muffin mix

Directions:

Spray a 3-quart pan with Pam. Mix ingredients and bake for 1 hour at 350 degrees.

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.