

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

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Annual Meeting Update

AN EXCERPT FROM THE ANNUAL MEETING SPEECH



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

When I started working at West Central in 1994, building an electric line was much simpler. If we had the easements, we could build the line. That was it. Today, things are much more complicated. We still need easements – though those are harder to obtain than they used to be – but now environmental regulations play a much bigger role and slow down the process.

Before we can even set a pole, we have to check archaeological databases. In some cases, archaeologists actually walk the path of our proposed line looking for artifacts. On top of that, we're required to send letters to tribal governments, many of which aren't even located in South Dakota. Depending on the results of all these steps, it can take much longer to build what used to be a routine line extension.

To give you an example of how regulation has changed: West Central is currently trying to renew our permit to keep 78 miles of distribution line in the National Grasslands and the Badlands. Twenty years ago, that permit was nine pages long. Today, we're up to 66 pages – and still don't have a permit in hand.

The irony is this: the same agency that's making it so difficult for us to get our permit is the one that allows you to buy a Trail Pass for the Black Hills in less than two minutes. That pass gives you permission to ride any trail without requiring you to wash your ATV, without worrying about endangered species, without restrictions for pollination seasons, and without having to call someone before you enter the permit area. Yet our

cooperative, which has been serving this area for decades with no issues, is tied up in red tape. To me, the process is backwards. A company with a proven track record should be able to renew a permit easier than the general public.

But enough about government regulation. Let's shift to another important topic: safety with large loads.

This past year, we've had several issues with oversized loads – loads 18 feet 6 inches tall or higher, often traveling from the port of Houston, TX, up to North Dakota or Canada. These loads move with a dozen employees and several escort vehicles, and their goal is simple: deliver as quickly as possible to maximize profit.

Here's the problem: it's illegal for anyone other than West Central to raise our lines. Yet we've caught these haulers sneaking through our system with their own bucket trucks, lifting our lines to get underneath, and endangering lives. Do you know the penalty if they're caught? Just \$189. That's all. When the profit motive is that strong, it's easy to see why they take the risk.

This is a serious safety issue – not just for our employees, but for you, our members. If you see a large load traveling through our area with non-West Central bucket trucks, please contact a West Central employee immediately. Your call could prevent an accident, or worse, a tragedy.

Now, let's turn to some positive news.

A couple of years ago, West Central applied for two grants totaling \$2.5 million – and I'm proud to report that we were awarded both. Once the government gives us final approval, we'll begin replacing 17 miles of old three-phase overhead line with brand-new underground line. This project will be built at a greatly reduced cost thanks to the grants, and that's a direct financial benefit for you, our members.

Another opportunity we're working with is Talus Ag, a fertilizer company looking to locate near Philip. Talus uses nitrogen from the air and hydrogen from water to create anhydrous ammonia. Their goal is to sell ammonia fertilizer at half the price of urea on a per unit of nitrogen basis. If this project comes to fruition, it could be a huge benefit to our ag producers and our local economy.

Continued on page 3.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

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(USPS No. 018-988)

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Design assistance by SDREA



Finally, let's talk about rates.

On Jan. 1, 2026, West Central will implement a 10% rate increase. This isn't something we take lightly, but it's necessary. The main reason is that our wholesale power cost is going up 15%, and we have no choice but to pass that through to our members. We are also dealing with our own cost increases.

I know every one of us has felt the sting of inflation – farm equipment, vehicles, clothing, groceries, you name it. The cooperative is no different. Let me share a few examples:

- In 2015, overhead wire cost 18 cents per foot. Today, it's 41 cents per foot – a 125% increase.
- Underground wire has gone from \$1.92 per foot to \$4.57 per foot – a 138% increase.
- A 35-foot pole, the most common size in our system, cost \$294 in 2015. Today, that same pole costs \$1,016 – an increase of 246%. And remember, we have around 65,000 poles in our system. For perspective, an 80-foot transmission line pole now costs \$7,644. You heard that right, \$7,644 for a single pole.
- Transformers have also skyrocketed. A 25 KVA overhead transformer went from \$794 in 2015 to \$2,119 today – a 167% increase. The underground version has jumped from \$1,113 to \$3,305, a 197% increase.

As you can see, the cost of materials we depend on has climbed dramatically over the last 10 years.

In closing, I want to thank each and every one of you for being here tonight and for your continued support of your cooperative. I also want to reiterate something Shad mentioned earlier: West Central has nothing to do with wind farms. By law, we're prohibited from buying power from them. The only involvement we have is providing them with station power when the wind isn't blowing.

Thank you again for your trust and support. This is your cooperative, and everything we do is for you, our members.

Stay Safe This Holiday Season:

Tips for a Merry and Accident-Free Celebration

The holidays bring families together with twinkling lights, festive meals and cozy traditions. But they also bring seasonal risks that can turn celebrations into emergencies if precautions aren't taken. Local safety officials are reminding residents to keep safety in mind when cooking, decorating, and entertaining this year.

Extension Cords

With more lights and electronics plugged in during the holidays, extension cords are often stretched to their limits. Experts urge homeowners not to overload outlets and to replace any cords that are frayed or damaged. Only outdoor-rated cords should be used outside, especially in snowy or wet conditions.

Families should avoid running cords under rugs or across doorways where they can overheat or become tripping hazards.

Turkey Fryers

Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners have grown to include deep-fried turkeys, but safety must come first. Fryers should only be used outdoors, on a flat surface and far away from buildings, garages or wooden decks. Fire officials caution that a partially frozen or wet turkey can cause oil to boil over and ignite, leading to severe burns or home fires.

A fire extinguisher rated for grease fires should always be kept nearby, and fryers should never be left unattended while in use. One distracted moment can cause a disaster.

Ladders

From hanging lights to topping off the tree, ladders are part of the holiday routine. Falls are among the most common seasonal injuries, so ladders should be set on level ground and never leaned against unstable surfaces. Having another person hold the ladder is strongly advised.

Candles and Fireplaces

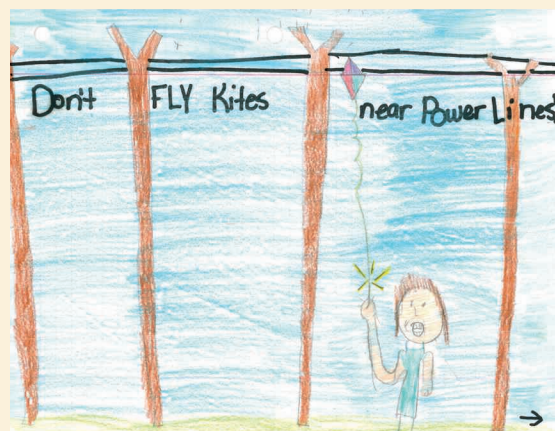
Candles and fireplaces are popular during the holiday season, but they also raise the risk of home fires, especially when combined with the extra decorations and greenery that fill many homes in December. According to the National Fire Protection Association, candles cause an average of

46% of fires in December each year. Never leaving a flame unattended and incorporating a few safety rules can prevent a devastating fire.

Lights and Decorations

Before hanging holiday lights, inspect strands for cracked socket, frayed wires or loose connections, and replace any damaged sets. Outdoor lights should always be weather-rated, and lights should be turned off before bedtime or when leaving the house. Timers and smart plugs can help make this easier.

Decorations should be securely fastened to prevent them from tipping or falling, especially in homes with children or pets. Heavy ornaments should be placed higher on the tree, out of reach of small hands and wagging tails. Fire officials also recommend choosing flame-resistant or non-combustible decor whenever possible and keeping all decorations away from heaters, fireplaces or open flames.



"Don't fly kites near power lines!"

Kristen Vanden Berg, Age 11

Kristen cautions readers on the dangers of flying kites near power lines. Great picture, Kristen! Kristen's parents are Andy and Geraldine Vanden Berg from Corsica, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

Holiday SIDE DISHES

CORN CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

2 15 oz. cans whole kernel corn, drained
15 oz. can cream corn
1/2 cup butter, melted
1 box Jiffy cornbread mix
1/2 pt. whipped cream

Method

Combine whole kernel corn, cream corn, butter, Jiffy cornbread mix and whipping cream. Mix thoroughly. Pour into greased 8.5"x11" pan and bake at 350° F for 40-45 minutes.

Sharon Houchin
Central Electric

BETTER THAN STUFFING

Ingredients:

1 box chicken/turkey stuffing mix
Chicken broth
Celery
Carrots
Onions
1 stick herbed butter (or make your own)
2 cups chicken/turkey gravy

Method

Prepare stuffing according to directions but substitute water with broth. Dice and sauté celery, carrots (total of two cups) and onions in herbed butter. Fold into stuffing. Put into baking pan and top with gravy. Poke gravy into stuffing – just a little bit. Don't completely mix. Bake at 350° F for 20 minutes and broil briefly at the end.

Valerie Marso
Oahe Electric

RAW VEGETABLE SALSA

Ingredients:

2-4 medium cucumbers, cubed
2-4 medium tomatoes, cubed
1 small onion or 1/2 of a white or yellow onion sliced
1 tsp. salt
1 tbsp. sugar
2 tbsps. apple cider vinegar
Additions: black pepper to taste, chopped basil, or chopped green bell pepper.

Method

Place cubed tomatoes and peeled cucumbers into a bowl. Add sliced onion.

Mix in remaining ingredients and stir. Marinate for several hours or overnight.

This salad keeps for 3-4 days refrigerated.

Raw Vegetable salads full of electrolytes, vitamin C and fiber.

Laurie Wernke
Southeastern Electric

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.



ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

On Oct. 1, West Central Electric held its annual meeting at the Expo Center in Fort Pierre, S.D. An estimated 270 guests participated in the evening's events, including the meeting, meal, prize giveaways, and a high-voltage demonstration.

Board President Shad Riggle officially called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. (CDT), after which Pastor Brian Schwartz gave the invocation. Military veterans and active service duty members were recognized for their sacrifices and the national anthem was sung by members of the Stanley County choir.

The board's report was given by Riggle, and among other things, wind generation projects were discussed.

"Many of you have asked about West Central's role in potential wind projects being proposed in Haakon and Stanley Counties. I want to be clear: if these projects move forward, West Central will have virtually no involvement. The only connection would be providing standby power, which we've been told is minimal.

West Central purchases all of its power from Basin Electric, and Basin will not buy energy from these turbines. Instead, that power would be sold on the larger transmission grid to non-co-op utilities. Now, one of the big drivers for wind development is the federal tax credit program. Wind farms can collect a production tax credit for the first 10 years they operate – right now, that's worth about \$30 for every megawatt hour

they generate. With the passing of the Big Beautiful Bill, those credits are set to expire soon. Under the current law, a project has to either be up and running by the end of 2027 or at least started by July of 2026 to qualify. What that means is we'll probably see a big push to get projects moving before that deadline closes," explained Shad.

In his speech, CEO/Manager Jeff Birkeland informed members of the co-op's business, which included rate pressure.

"On Jan. 1, 2026, West Central will implement a 10% rate increase. This



\$300 cash prize winners with Manager of Member Services Jessie Tucker: Karen Bower, Robin Cromwell, Rex Totten, Michael Nemec and Robert Rose

Annual Meeting Recap Continued

isn't something we take lightly, but it's necessary. The main reason is that our wholesale power cost is going up 15%, and we have no choice but to pass that through to our members. We are also dealing with our own cost increases," Birkeland states.

Board Vice President, Ken Miller, presented service awards to Member Service Rep Joni Moore for 10 years, Staff Assistant Steph Hespe for 10 years, Manager of Member Services Jessie Tucker for 15 years, Line Superintendent Seth Geigle for 20 years, Technician Jared Dowling for 25 years, and Finance Manager Jill Rankin for 25 years. This year, there were no retirements at West Central Electric.

Attorney David Larson presented his legal report and announced that three directors were appointed to three-year terms: Cliff Uthe, representing Lyman County; Rich Bendt, representing Jackson County; and Kevin Neuhauser, representing Haakon County.

The guest speaker, Basin Electric VP of Strategic Planning and Communications Andy Buntrock, spoke on a Basin Electric update and the main drivers causing rate pressure.

The meeting featured a free roast beef dinner prepared and served by the Fort Pierre Chamber of Commerce. All attendees received a 25-foot extension cord. Additional prizes and cash drawings were held throughout the evening, and a powerline safety demonstration was conducted.

Happy Thanksgiving!

West Central Electric will be closed Nov. 27-28 for Thanksgiving Day. Have a safe and happy holiday!



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CARING FOR CAREGIVERS

Exploring Structured Family Caregiving Services for South Dakota's Caregivers

Frank Turner

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November is recognized nationally as Family Caregivers Month, a time to honor the essential role of caregivers and highlight the resources available to them and the loved ones they support.

Yet, families face a growing challenge: how to care for aging loved ones when services are often far from home. Nursing homes or assisted living centers may be located hours away, and even when they are nearby, the cost or availability of space can present real barriers.

One answer has been the Structured Family Caregiving program, launched by the South Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2019.

According to Heather Krzmarzick, Director of the Division of Long-Term Services and Supports within DHS, the program is one of many resources at DHS that are

Several resources are available for caregivers in South Dakota through the Department of Human Services.

Photos by Homecare Services.

available to help older adults and their caregivers. It provides training, coaching, ongoing support and even a modest stipend to those offering significant care for an older adult in the home.

“Structured Family Caregiving serves caregivers who live with their family member and provide substantial care for them, including personal care, supervision, medication management and other things, such as managing finances and transportation for necessary appointments and community activities,” Krzmarzick said.

In many ways, the program echoes the electric cooperative story. Just as co-ops once brought electricity to rural areas that were otherwise overlooked, the program helps families meet a need that might otherwise go unserved. In places where nursing homes or assisted living centers are many miles away, the program gives families a practical way to continue care at home, often the place where people feel most comfortable.

“Structured Family Caregiving is important because it

supports the vital work of family caregivers, strengthens families and improves outcomes, especially in underserved or isolated regions,” she said. “The program honors South Dakota’s values of strong families, independence and community.”

In addition to expanding community-based care options to rural areas, the program allows families to potentially prevent or delay the move to a nursing home and reduce the economic burden that often comes with that transition. Krzmarzick said DHS also offers other programs for those that may need a little extra assistance to remain safely in their homes but don’t require the intensive services of a nursing facility.

“Each caregiver has unique needs and preferences,” she said. “As such, the services and supports are designed to meet the varying needs of each caregiver and help care for a person at home as long as possible.”

To be eligible for the program, the care recipient must be 65 or older or

18 or older with a qualifying disability and meet both functional and financial criteria to qualify for the program.

Since its creation, the program has grown steadily, giving more families the tools to succeed. Krzmarzick said it has allowed many older adults and adults with disabilities to remain in their homes while supporting family caregivers with knowledge, training and a small amount of financial assistance.

Agency Director Steven Novotny with Homecare Services of South Dakota, Inc., one of many in-home care providers in the state, said that few other programs reach and serve those who need care quite like the program.

“Structured Family Caregiving has the unique ability to serve consumers in every community across our state, large or small. Under this program, individuals can receive care from a trusted family member or friend, which allows them to remain independent and living in their community,” he said. “Our caring staff at Homecare Services of South Dakota have seen

firsthand the positive impact on families when we are able to provide support and training to the caregivers that are stepping into what is often a challenging role caring for a loved one.”

Krzmarzick said the Structured Family Caregiving program is just one of many support options that DHS offers individuals and their caregivers in South Dakota. Resources are available online at dhs.sd.gov or through Dakota at Home, South Dakota’s Aging and Disability Resource Center, at 1-833-663-9673.

“All caregivers, not just those utilizing the Structured Family Caregiving Program, may access free training and resources to help improve confidence in their caregiving abilities, reduce stress and prevent burnout,” Krzmarzick said. “Caregivers may also be eligible for other programs that offer respite options. Our Dakota at Home specialists are dedicated to helping you find services and supports to meet your specific needs or the needs of a family member.”



How Electric Cooperatives Can Innovate with AI

Shane Schwartz

NRECA

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a trendy, high-tech buzzword for the exclusive domain of data scientists and Silicon Valley firms. Today, electric cooperatives across the country are discovering how AI – particularly generative AI and large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and Gemini – can transform the way they power their local communities. From improving reliability and safety to enhancing member services and streamlining daily operations, AI is helping electric co-ops do more with less.

Cooperatives are known for wearing many hats – from utility operators to first responders, to local economic development engines. But for many co-ops, limited staffing and tight budgets can make it difficult to explore new technologies.

AI tools, especially LLMs, now offer copy-and-paste workflows that anyone can use. Whether you're a system engineer, a vegetation manager or a communications specialist, AI can act as a digital assistant – automating routine tasks, analyzing data and accelerating insights without any coding skills required. Even for experienced programmers, AI offers value. Those with technical backgrounds can use AI to rapidly test models, tune code or generate outputs in a timelier manner. But the real

innovation is that now, anyone at an electric co-op can access the benefits of advanced analytics and automation. While the specific tools and datasets may vary, most AI applications follow a simple process:

1. **Gathering Data:** Relevant information can be pulled from internal systems or spreadsheets.
2. **Understand Data:** AI can be used to summarize, structure or flag any potential issues in the dataset.
3. **Apply a Prompt:** Use a tested prompt to ask AI to perform a specific task or analysis.
4. **Put AI to Work:** AI-generated insights or outputs can be utilized to inform business decisions or create deliverables.

These tasks often take just a few hours to complete. Yet the time saved – and the ability to tackle previously out-of-reach projects – can have long-lasting, positive impact across multiple departments.

Let's take a look at some of the most promising applications for AI.

Load Forecasting and Peak Prediction

AI can analyze historical data on the demand for electricity, weather trends and consumer behavior to forecast future demand requirements. With simple prompt-based tools, electric co-ops can generate accurate predictions – helping them plan for high-demand periods without complex software or deep technical expertise.

Anomaly Detection and Phase Identification

AI can quickly scan SCADA systems, automated meter data or voltage datasets to detect unusual patterns – identifying issues like mis-phased meters or early signs of equipment failure before they escalate into power outages.

Vegetation Management

By combining satellite imagery, LiDAR data and AI-powered image recognition, co-ops can assess and prioritize vegetation encroachments more efficiently – proactively preventing disruptions and reducing manual fieldwork.

Safety and Compliance

AI can draft job hazard analyses, summarize safety reports or even generate site-specific assessments – all in minutes. This supports a safer work environment for all co-op employees while easing the documentation burden on safety staff.

Back-Office Productivity

LLMs are also proving useful in administrative tasks: crafting job descriptions, summarizing long reports, drafting member-facing messages and analyzing social sentiment around new rates and co-op services.

AI certainly isn't a cure-all – but it is a powerful tool when applied thoughtfully. For electric cooperatives, it's not about chasing tech trends – it's about solving real-world problems, reducing strain on limited resources and delivering more value to co-op communities. As AI tools become easier to use and more tailored to the needs of rural utilities, the path forward is clear: co-ops are positioned not just to adopt AI, but to shape how it's used to better serve their members.

"NOT-FOR-PROFIT" MEANS "ALL FOR YOU"

Scott Flood

NRECA

It's hard to imagine what our daily lives would be like without electricity. Every year, our dependence on what travels across poles and wires to our homes and businesses grows. We act as though electricity has always been there, take its presence for granted, and can't imagine life without it. Even the shortest power outage manages to turn our world upside-down.

But 90 years ago, when President Franklin Roosevelt signed the executive order that created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), nobody in America's small towns and wide-open spaces took electricity for granted. That's because most of them didn't have access to it.

As the 19th Century drew to a close, wealthy investors were starting electricity utility companies in cities from coast to coast. Building power plants and installing power lines was costly, so investors focused their effort in places with the highest population density. Few gave any thought to rural America. Built-up areas offered more customers in smaller spaces, which helped those utilities become highly profitable. Running power lines to serve a handful of consumers spread across so many thousands of acres just didn't make economic sense, so most utilities ignored them. After all, they couldn't make as much money serving those places.

Long after their city cousins became accustomed to enjoying the wonders of electric lighting and the earliest home appliances, folks in more remote

areas could only dream about the convenience. The REA was created to change that, providing a source of expertise and financing for a new concept in energy: the rural electric power cooperative.

Besides the areas each served, the most important distinctions between those big utilities and the new co-ops involved who owned them and their purpose. As the name implies, investor-owned utilities are owned by people who buy stock in the utilities. The primary goal of those utilities is to make money to distribute to their investors through dividends and generate higher per-share prices to increase those investors' wealth.

Electric cooperatives are built and owned not by investors, but by the very people they serve. They're led by boards of local residents who are elected by their neighbors to represent them and are responsible for acting in the members' best interests.

The primary goal of a co-op isn't to make money, but to provide a safe and reliable source of electricity at a cost the local community can afford. As not-for-profit organizations, they receive their money from members when they pay electric bills, then use most of that money to purchase and deliver electricity. They typically set aside some money for the future and emergency needs. And, because they employ local people who patronize local businesses, much of the money they earn stays in the communities they serve, boosting the local economy.

Most co-ops purchase electricity on the wholesale power market and turn around and sell it to members

at a slight markup designed to cover the costs associated with operating the co-op and maintaining the infrastructure for delivering power. That's why co-ops don't make more money when you use more power, or when wholesale prices increase. It's also why they are dedicated to helping their members reduce energy consumption and lower their power bills.

When co-ops earn more than they pay out in wholesale energy and other costs, they keep some the extra money in reserves or return it to their members through what are known as capital credits.

Because co-ops exist to serve their members and not profit-hungry investors, they have an obligation to keep the price of electricity as low as possible. When members spend less for their electricity, they have more money to use on what's important to them.

Co-ops also work to support the area's economic health through activities designed to bring new employers to the community and help existing businesses expand. That's particularly important, because many of the areas served by co-ops face economic challenges. One in four households on co-op lines nationally has an annual income of below \$35,000, making keeping rates affordable a key priority.

When the leaders of investor-owned utilities make decisions, their first thought is how those choices will affect the price of their company's stock. When co-op leaders make decisions, they're focused on doing the best thing for their members. Instead of trying to impress Wall Street, co-ops want to make sure they're meeting your needs for power at the best price possible. That's because they're truly not for profit – instead, they're for you and your neighbors.



LINEMENS' TRAINING READYED CREW FOR CHAINSAW ACCIDENT

(From left) When Brandon Schmiege cut his forearm, fellow linemen Tristan Hall, Luke Koval and Brian Davis knew exactly how to respond.
Photo submitted by Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative.

When a Routine Day of Trimming Trees Turned Critical, Cooperative Employees Were Prepared to Help

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Perched within the manlift on a bucket truck, Brandon Schmiege methodically sawed away large tree branches near overhead power lines, dropping them to the ground more than 50 feet below.

It's nothing out of the ordinary, explained the 19-year veteran lineman from Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative in Milbank, South Dakota. After a while, you become accustomed to the work – and its hazards.

From the bucket he was standing in, Brandon reached with

his chainsaw for one of the last few cuts he'd need to make. But as he began the cut, the chainsaw kicked up and he lost control. Steadying himself and throwing the brake on the saw, Brandon looked down at his left arm. He'd been badly cut.

"I saw quite a bit of blood right away," Brandon said. "My first thought was that I needed to get down fast."

Gathering his strength and trying his best to stay calm, Brandon maneuvered his bucket down through the tree limbs back to the ground where linemen Brian Davis, Luke Koval and Tristan Hall noticed something wasn't right.

"I think we all sensed something happened," Brian explained. "The way he was coming down like that, and he'd just fueled up the saw, so we were wondering what had happened."

Luke ran to go shut off the woodchipper, which was drowning out Brandon's yelling. As the engine died, they finally heard Brandon yell, "Call for help!"

Brian raced to the truck to radio back to the office in Milbank, calling in a “Mayday” along with the crew’s location.

With a first-aid and tourniquet kit in hand, Brian sprinted toward Brandon, where Tristan and Luke had removed Brandon’s safety harness and wrapped a towel over the wound on Brandon’s forearm and applied pressure to slow the bleeding.

As the team secured a tourniquet tightly around Brandon’s upper arm, the crew kept in touch with the office by cell phone. The office staff, having called 911 as soon as they heard ‘Mayday,’ worked together to relay the street address and details of the injury to emergency dispatchers.

Seeing the urgency of the situation, the team placed Brandon in the service pickup and Tristan began driving him to the hospital. As the linemen were driving back into town, the ambulance met them and took Brandon to the hospital in Milbank where they stabilized him and discovered he’d severed two arteries in his forearm. He was then transferred to

Sioux Falls and underwent surgery.

Luckily, Whetstone Valley Electric and the South Dakota Rural Electric Association had conducted first-aid training for linemen just several weeks before. The instruction included CPR, AEDs, tourniquets and wound care.

“Regular first-aid training and keeping first-aid supplies on hand is so important because our linemen are often out somewhere rural,” explained Joe Denison, SDREA’s loss control professional and certified paramedic for the Arlington and Lake Norden ambulances. “If we have to wait 30 minutes for an ambulance, that can be too late.”

Whetstone Valley Electric General Manager Dave Page says despite the incident, he finds it encouraging that the employees followed procedure — maintaining clear communication with each other and with 911, administering first aid on site, and knowing exactly what to do each step of the way.

“It wasn’t only the training that was provided, but it was the attention that

these guys gave to that training - where it stuck, and their response was automatic,” Dave said. “In addition, the Mayday training that we do here at Whetstone went a long way to help us all stick to the plan and see a successful outcome.”

Now back on the job, Brandon credits his safe outcome to the co-op’s focus on regular safety training and having first aid supplies in the vehicles.

“I don’t think the makeshift towel tourniquet would have stopped the bleeding,” Brandon said, looking down at the scar on his forearm.

Brian added, “I don’t want to think about the outcome if we didn’t have a plan in place.”

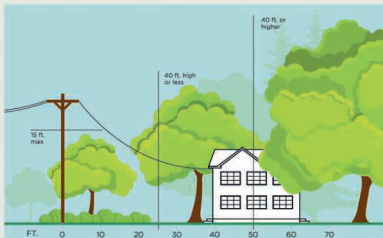
To help prevent those worst case scenarios, electric cooperatives continually scrutinize safety training and workplace incidents. Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative is sharing this story with its members-owners and fellow cooperatives to promote preparedness for unexpected incidents like this one, and overall encourage a culture of safety awareness.

3 Ways to Help Limit Tree Trimming

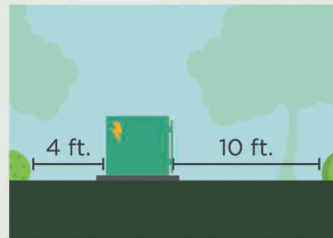
Did you know electric utilities are required to trim trees and other types of vegetation that grow too close to overhead power lines? We know you love your trees, and we will do everything we can to avoid trimming them.

Here’s how you can help:

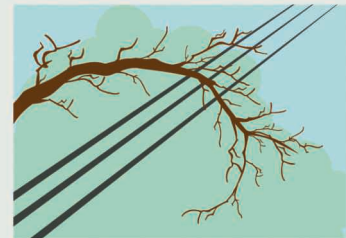
1. Plant trees in the right place. Trees that will be <40 ft. should be planted at least 25 ft. away from power lines (>40ft. should be at least 50 ft. away).



2. Don’t block pad-mounted transformers. Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. away from transformer doors and 4 ft. from transformer sides.



3. Report dangerous branches. If you spot a tree or branch that is dangerously close to power lines, please let us know.



Trimming improves safety for all.

Let’s work together to enjoy the beauty of trees and reliable electricity.

SUSTAINABLE SERVINGS

Frederick-Area Family Grows, Packages Specialty Oatmeal

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

For Taylor and Cassandra Sumption, there's nothing better than waking up early and enjoying a bowl of their very own home-grown oatmeal.

Well, maybe nothing better except sharing that taste of small-town South Dakota with the world.

Living and working on their five-generation family farm in northeast South Dakota, the Northern Electric Cooperative member-family dreamed, developed and launched Anthem Oats, which they say is a farm-to-table alternative that oatmeal enjoyers can feel good about.

But Anthem Oats isn't just a locally-sourced breakfast; it's a process rooted in sustainability.

The Sumptions' small-business journey began in 2016 when Taylor decided to replace his usual wheat cover crop with oats in his corn and soybean rotation.

"I'm kind of a nerd when it comes to crop rotation," Taylor laughed. "I started working with the USDA research farm north of Brookings, and they do a lot of rotational studies ... What I saw was a tremendous increase in yield for crops following oats."

Those increased yields are a result of the oats recycling nutrients like nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus back into the soil. Oats also increase the amount of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi in the soil, which the USDA says helps roots intake more nutrients and moisture, making oats an ideal

This field of oats on Taylor and Cassandra Sumptions' farm near Frederick, S.D., will soon be milled and packaged for their oatmeal brand, Anthem Oats.

Photo submitted by Cassandra Sumption

cover crop to boost the next season's returns.

But an oat harvest doesn't bring in the same returns that corn and soybeans do – that had Taylor Sumption thinking about ways to add value to his product.

"It was Taylor's idea from the very beginning, from years and years ago, after many long hours in the tractor thinking about how to bring added value to our farm," Cassandra recalled. "And I loved his ideas. He would just kind of bounce things off me every now and then."

One day, it clicked in Taylor's head; he could add value to his oat harvest by producing a one-of-a-kind, high-quality breakfast product.

Taylor got in contact with the South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center (VAADC), whom he credits for helping navigate the first steps in starting the business.

Maple Pecan is one of Anthem Oats' top-selling flavors. Among other flavor options: pumpkin spice, vanilla chai, peach and cranberry, super fruit, and dark chocolate brownie.





Taylor and Cassandra Sumption sell their home-grown oatmeal in stores across the US.
Photo submitted by Cassandra Sumption

VAADC CEO Cheri Rath says Anthem Oats is one of the center's many success stories, and credits the Sumptions for coming up with a marketable idea and running a sustainable business.

"Anthem Oats takes a traditional commodity and adds value to it, helping their farm diversify and add profitability at a time when commodity prices are volatile," Rath said. "They've done an awesome job of branding themselves and getting out into the marketplace."

According to Taylor and Cassandra, feedback from customers has been overwhelmingly positive, with some customers noting that Anthem Oats' subtle differences have distinguished the brand from competition.

"When selecting our oat variety was we focused on nutrient density and nutritional value," Taylor explained. "Our oats mill a little tougher, but there's a little more flavor and a little more body. Consumers can tell when it's our oats."

Cassandra, now a full-time Anthem Oats employee, oversees the product from the harvest to the shelf, and everything in between. It's an around-the-clock job, and one she had to learn fast.

"I didn't have a clue – this was all so new to me," Cassandra laughed, thinking back to when she first jumped into the role. "I did manage a grocery store in Frederick here for a short time, so that kind of helped me with the logistics of shipping and freight and different things like that."

Today, after more than four years on the market and a continuously growing presence in grocery stores, the Sumption family has unofficially put Frederick on the map as the oatmeal capital of South Dakota.

Cassandra and Taylor also credit their five children, Trevor, Tristan, Preston, Miranda and Marissa for taking time out of their busy lives to help out when they're able, as the family works to build a brand that resonates with consumers in South Dakota and beyond.

"I get to answer all the emails, like all of the consumers' questions, and sometimes there's a complaint, but overall everybody is very kind and sweet in their messages," Cassandra said. "It helps make your day a little brighter, knowing that you're doing something that people actually really appreciate and love, and it just makes you feel good at the end of the day and keeps you going."



What Is the Value-Added Agriculture Development Center?

VAADC is a nonprofit that provides resources for the establishment and success of value-added agricultural businesses.

What Does Value-Added Mean?

When farmers add value to their product, it means they are taking a raw commodity and processing, marketing or otherwise enhancing so it can be sold at a higher price. The Sumption family adds value to their oat harvest by milling, packaging and distributing their product.

What Does VAADC Offer to Start-ups?

VAADC can assist start-ups with feasibility assessments, business plans, grant and funding opportunities, strategic planning and networking. VAADC has assisted more than 300 projects since its founding in 1999.

Who Is VAADC?

VAADC was started by agriculture industry supporters to support producers. VAADC is governed by a board of directors representing the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, East River Electric, Farm Credit Services of America, S.D. Association of Cooperatives, S.D. Bankers Association, S.D. Farmers Union, S.D. Soybean Research & Promotion Council, and the S.D. Wheat Commission.



NOV 22, 26, 28-29

Christmas Tree Sales

Nov. 22: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Nov. 26: 5-8 p.m.

Nov. 28-29: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

6B Seed And Supplies

Alpena, SD

www.6Bseedandsupplies.com

OCT. 25

Hill City Children's Boo Bash & Pumpkin Festival

Hill City, SD

OCT. 25

Lions Club Bingo

5 p.m. Food, 6 p.m. Bingo

Hill City Center

Hill City, SD

OCT. 31

Hill City Main Street Merchant Trick-or-treat Boys & Girls Club Annual Halloween Carnival

Hill City, SD

NOV. 1

Reliance Christmas Carousel

9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Reliance, SD

605-730-1462

NOV. 1

Spearfish Senior Center Fall Craft Fair & Bake Sale

9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Spearfish, SD

605-642-2827

NOV. 1

Black Hills Meat Fest

2-4 p.m.

Nerdy Nuts Expo Hall

Rapid City, SD

NOV. 1

Fairburn Community Ctr. Bazaar

5:30 p.m.

Linn Street

Fairburn, SD

NOV. 2

Annual Turkey Dinner & Silent Auction Fundraiser

11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Tickets In-Person or Online

Rapid Valley UMC

5103 Longview Rd.

Rapid City, SD

605-393-1526

NOV. 7-9

Hill City Girlfriends' Weekend

Information on Facebook Page

Hill City, SD

NOV. 9

Kadoka Holiday Festival

10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Kadoka City Auditorium

Kadoka, SD

605-488-0151

NOV. 15

Dueling Pianos

Playing for Permanency

5:30 p.m.

Holiday Inn & Convention Center

Spearfish, SD

605-722-4558

NOV. 16

An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving

2 p.m.

Gayville Music Hall

Gayville, SD

605-760-5799

NOV. 22

Lille Norge Fest

8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Viking Hall

2900 Canyon Lake Dr.

Rapid City, SD

NOV. 28

Snacks With Santa

2-4 p.m.

Hill City Center

Hill City, SD

NOV. 28-29

Kris Kringle Vendor Fair

Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Hill City High School

Hill City, SD

NOV. 29

Gregory Mid-Winter Fair

9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Gregory Memorial Auditorium

Gregory, SD

605-295-4345

DEC. 5-6

Christmas in the Hills

Mueller Center

Hot Springs, SD

605-890-2974

DEC. 7

KCBA Hometown Christmas

10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Kadoka City Auditorium

Kadoka, SD

605-488-0151

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.