

● JANUARY 2026

Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Iowa electric co-ops shine
in national commercial**

**Energy efficiency
rebates for 2026**

Vegetarian recipes

Powered for Success Scholarship Program ▶ See Page 5

CONTENTS



VOLUME 79 • ISSUE 1

3

STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

2026 legislative session preview

3

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Ninja Crispi air fryer

14

RELIABILITY MATTERS

Keeping outages at bay

15

OUT BACK

Wishing you an "awe"some year

EDITOR
Ann Foster Thelen

DESIGNERS
Megan Walters
Bree Glenn
Lorelai O'Hara

IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
Erin Campbell

IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
Leslie Kaufman

IAEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Jim Miller, District 5 – President
Gordon Greimann, District 6 – Vice President
Tony Lem, District 2 – Secretary/Treasurer
Jerry Keleher, District 3 – Asst. Secretary/Treasurer
Travis Harris, District 1
Steve Inskeep, District 4
Bruce Amundson, District 7
Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative – NRECA Representative
Terry Sullivan, Corridor Energy Cooperative – Managers' Representative

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

Editorial Office
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

Email Address
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

Website
www.ieclmagazine.com

Postmaster
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

Change of Address
Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2026, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.



ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Michelle Benton, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

PROTECTING IOWA'S POWER: KEY ENERGY POLICIES TO WATCH THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON



As the Iowa Legislature prepares to convene on Jan. 12, electric cooperatives across the state are focused on defending the policies and protections that keep power reliable and affordable for our communities. For more than eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have prioritized the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting local economies and strengthening the power grid. This work relies heavily on Iowa's defined electric service territories, an important law that helps ensure every corner of the state receives consistent, cost-effective electric service.

Protecting service territories and grid reliability

For rural communities in particular, defined electric service territories are vital. By assigning each utility the responsibility to serve a specific geographic area, every Iowan is guaranteed electric service that avoids redundant infrastructure, reduces costs and allows utilities the certainty to make long-term investments in grid resilience. These protections help cooperatives maintain affordable rates and plan strategically to meet future needs. As legislators return to Des Moines, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken this foundational law or erode the consumer benefits it provides.

One challenge that could resurface is a third-party or "community solar" proposal. During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers considered legislation that would have allowed non-utility solar developers to provide retail electric service inside

an established utility's service area, which is in direct conflict with Iowa's service territory statute. While these programs are often marketed as cost-saving options, the details can be far less rosy. Because third-party developers are not held to the same consumer protection standards or regulatory oversight as Iowa's public utilities, they can shift grid maintenance and infrastructure costs onto customers who do not subscribe.

Cooperatives are not opposed to solar – far from it. Iowa's electric co-ops have long supported the adoption of solar when and where it benefits their members and aligns with responsible grid planning. But allowing non-utilities to operate independently within the defined area of public utility, even on a limited basis, sets a precedent that threatens system stability statewide.

Strengthening safety protections for utility workers

Another priority heading into the upcoming legislative session

is protecting utility workers. Lineworkers are often the first on the scene after storms and work long hours in hazardous conditions to restore essential services. Despite the critical role they play in delivering power to our communities, something alarming is happening. Threats, harassment and assaults against utility workers while on the job are increasing nationwide. Strengthening penalties for violence against utility workers reaffirms our commitment to the safety of cooperative employees and our communities.

No matter what this session may bring, you can rest assured knowing that your cooperative will be advocating for policies to keep electricity safe and affordable for you and your community.

Haley Moon is the senior manager of policy and advocacy for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A NINJA CRISPI AIR FRYER!

The Ninja Crispi® Portable Glass Cooking System is a compact powerhouse that packs the 1,500 watts power of a full-sized air fryer into a portable design. It includes a small 6-cup and larger 4-quart CleanCrisp™ container. Whether you're making quick, single-serve meals in just 7 minutes or sharing crispy snacks on the go, the Ninja Crispi® makes it effortless.



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Jan. 31.

You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Sarah Silhanek**, a **T.I.P. REC** member-consumer.

ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!

REBATE PROGRAM: HELPING MEMBERS SAVE IN 2026

As we begin a new year, Franklin REC reminds our members of the many ways you can save energy – and money – through our rebate program. Whether you're upgrading old equipment, improving your home's efficiency or exploring new energy-saving options, our rebates are designed to make smart choices even more affordable.

A program built for members

Franklin REC's rebate program is part of our commitment to supporting members beyond the meter. By encouraging the use of energy-efficient products, we help reduce long-term energy costs while promoting responsible energy use across our communities.

What's available?

Members can take advantage of rebates on a wide range of qualifying upgrades, including:

- ENERGY STAR®-rated appliances
- HVAC upgrades and heat pumps

- Electric water heaters
- Weatherization improvements
- Electric vehicle chargers
- Smart thermostats
- Energy-efficient lighting

Rebates vary by category, so we encourage members to review the full list before making a purchase.

Simple steps to save

Applying for a rebate is quick and easy:

- 1 Purchase and install a qualifying product.
- 2 Complete the rebate form available on our website or at the cooperative office.
- 3 Submit your form with a copy of your receipt or invoice.
- 4 Our team is always happy to help answer questions or guide you through the process.



START THE YEAR WITH SMART SAVINGS

Now is the perfect time to plan for energy-smart upgrades. Whether you're tackling small improvements or planning major projects, Franklin REC's rebate program can help stretch your budget while boosting efficiency.

To explore rebate opportunities and access application forms, visit www.franklinrec.coop or stop by our office. Let's make 2026 a year of smart energy choices – together.



Office

1560 Highway 65 • P.O. Box 437
Hampton, IA 50441

Office Hours

Monday-Friday 7:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Closed Saturdays, Sundays and holidays

Telephone Number

641-456-2557
Calls answered 24/7

Secure Pay-by-Phone Number

1-855-940-3953

Website

www.franklinrec.coop

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

SCOTT HAGENSON CELEBRATES THREE YEARS WITH FRANKLIN REC

Franklin REC is proud to recognize Line Superintendent Scott Hagenson, who is celebrating three years of service with the cooperative. Scott plays a key role in overseeing daily line operations, supporting our crews, and helping plan and strengthen our power grid to ensure safe, reliable service for our members.

We congratulate Scott on this milestone and appreciate his dedication to Franklin REC and the communities we serve.



POWERED FOR SUCCESS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Franklin REC is excited to introduce the new Powered for Success Scholarship Program, designed to help our members or their dependents pursue their educational dreams. Whether you're heading straight to college, exploring a trade program or returning to school later in life, these scholarships are here to provide financial support and encouragement on your journey.

Scholarships offered:

- **Industrial & Commercial Wiring / Powerline Scholarship** – For students pursuing programs in wiring or powerline technology through Northwest Iowa Community College and Corn Belt Power Cooperative. *Award: \$500*
- **Agriculture & Rural Development Scholarship** – Supports students pursuing agricultural studies. *Award: \$1,500*
- **Basin Electric Power Cooperative Scholarship** – Supports dependents continuing post-secondary education or trade programs. *Total awards: \$2,500*
- **Rural Leadership & Service Scholarship** – For students studying public service, community development, cooperative business or education. *Award: \$500*
- **Reignite Your Future Scholarship** – For adult students returning to education after some time away. *Award: \$1,500*
- **Skilled Trades & Technical Scholarship** – For students pursuing a trade or technical program. *Award: \$1,500*
- **Wind Energy & Turbine Technology Scholarship** – Supports students enrolled in Iowa Lakes Community College wind energy program. *Award: \$500*



The Powered for Success Scholarship Program is part of Franklin REC's commitment to helping our members and their families grow, learn and thrive.

For full details, eligibility requirements, and application information, visit www.franklinrec.coop/powered-success-scholarship-program.

FRANKLIN REC IS SEEKING NOMINEES FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Franklin REC is currently seeking nominations for its Board of Directors. This is a unique opportunity for members of the cooperative to contribute to the future of the organization. Serving on the board allows individuals to represent their fellow co-op members, ensuring their voices are heard and the cooperative continues to thrive.

How can you become a nominee?

If you're ready to take on a leadership role, here are the qualifications to become a nominee for the Franklin REC Board of Directors:

- Be an active Franklin REC member in good standing.
- Must not have been an employee of Franklin REC within the last five years.
- Committed to the cooperative's values and mission.
- Have a primary residence within Franklin REC service territory.
- Cannot be a close relative of a current employee.
- Have no felony convictions in the past 10 years.
- Be willing to attend all board and special meetings.
- Must not have any conflicts of interest with the cooperative or its business.

If you meet these qualifications and have a passion for serving your community, we encourage you to step forward and become a nominee for the Franklin REC Board of Directors. Your voice and vision could help be part of shaping the future of our cooperative.

Ready to lead?

If you're interested in becoming a nominee for a director position, please reach out to your district's nominating committee member, this information can be found in a separate mailing from Franklin REC. You may also contact Franklin REC at 641-456-2557 to learn more.





LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

More than 375 directors and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives gathered in West Des Moines for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) 2025 Annual Meeting on Dec. 4-5. With the theme Leading through Change, the event highlighted the industry's ongoing transformation and the importance of strong leadership.

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman, who marked her first year with the association in July, noted the momentum of the year. Board President Jim Miller also reflected on his first year in the role, recalling how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Gov. Kim Reynolds during his second week as president. The conversation focused on emerging energy policy issues, underscoring the responsibility and visibility of the position. Miller also praised Kaufman's early outreach to member co-ops, which helped shape IAEC's strategic direction.

In her executive report, Kaufman outlined departmental progress and emphasized the critical role of advocacy as policy challenges accelerate. She highlighted a new policy and advocacy framework designed to help statewide staff work more proactively in the years ahead.

Educational sessions once again played a central role in the meeting. Speakers included National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board President Mike Partin, who joined Kaufman for a fireside chat on leading through change; nuclear engineer and Miss America 2023 Grace Vanderhei; Youth Leadership Council delegate Ava Meinders; governance experts from Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and NRECA; and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners Executive Director Tony Clark, who addressed national issues, including resource adequacy,

cybersecurity and the growing electricity demands of AI and data centers. NFL Hall of Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent closed the event with leadership insights from his career in sports, business and politics.

IAEC also recognized longtime contributors and emerging leaders, including service award recipients, Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) graduates, Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) certified cooperatives, nationally credentialed directors and the inaugural Iowa Electric Cooperative Excellence Award honorees: Director Excellence Award recipient Jerry Beck of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative and Employee Excellence Award recipient Robert Wakhouse of Harrison County REC.

Watch for more information about key annual meeting topics in upcoming issues of this magazine.

COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM

Congratulations to the 13 graduates of the 2025 CLIP for emerging leaders.

Participants committed to a year-long calendar of in-person, virtual and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives and attended statewide events to better understand important issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.



IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the IAEC annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the RESAP in 2025. The cooperatives included:

- Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Corn Belt Power Cooperative
- Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative
- Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative
- Western Iowa Power Cooperative

RESAP is a service of the NRECA and strives to promote the highest standards of safety among electric cooperatives.

IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements. The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative's safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA, as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative.

Zach Finn
Central Iowa Power Cooperative

Justin Krueger
Consumers Energy

Ben Donnelly
East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

Mindy Comstock
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Emily Rush
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

Johnna Nunemaker
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

Abby Fischer
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

Kraig Johnson
MiEnergy Cooperative

Jason Stock
Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative

Steve Jackson
Prairie Energy Cooperative

Alicia Lohr
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Tanner Rinehart
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

Jason Jack
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative



2025 CLIP graduates. Pictured from left: Jason Stock, Zach Finn, Johnna Nunemaker, Alicia Lohr, Abby Fischer, Emily Rush, Mindy Comstock, Jason Jack, Kraig Johnson, Steve Jackson, Tanner Rinehart, Ben Donnelly and Justin Krueger.

DIRECTOR GOLD CREDENTIAL

The NRECA Director Gold Credential (DGC) recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate credentials and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. The following have achieved or maintained their DGC.

David Hollingsworth
Michael Holtkamp
Access Energy Cooperative

Jerry Keleher
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

Allyn Harms
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

Steve Boedecker
James Miller
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

Kenneth Vandenberg
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Cody Miller
William White
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Dennis Beckman
William Hobson
Consumers Energy

Joel Carstensen
Gary Kester
Kurt Olson
Kathrine Wunderlich
Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative

Mark Earhart
Kristopher Petter
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Gordon Greimann
Donald Greimann
John Snyder
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

Kevin Pruisner
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

Brenda Lundergard
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

Tricia Jaeger
Mark Kingland
Vince Morische
Heartland Power Cooperative

Bruce Amundson
Craig Deim
Crystal Pluth
Mark Tuttle
Trent Will
Roger Williamson
Daniel Winterhof
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

Gary Schlotterbeck
Kenneth Squires
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

Judy Gotto
Thomas Stewart
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

Gene Kenkel
Donna Olson
Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative

Dale Ullrich
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

Bryce Arkema
Darrell Boot
Carroll Hoksbergen
Steve Inskeep
Jon Van Woerkom
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

David Onken
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Ronald Hoffman
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Phillip Jensen
Scott Linville
United Electric Cooperative



CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 large apple, chopped
- 1 large celery stalk, chopped
- 2 tablespoons green onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon honey (or white corn syrup)
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic raspberry blush vinegar
- kosher salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Prepare quinoa according to package directions. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, until cooled completely. In a large bowl, toss cooled quinoa, walnuts, raisins, apple, celery and onion together. In a separate bowl, mix honey or corn syrup and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator until ready to serve. *Serves 8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny
Prairie Energy Cooperative

CUKE, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

- 1 medium cucumber, sliced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 medium tomatoes, cubed
- 2 teaspoons dill weed
- 1 tablespoon salad oil
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- dash of pepper, optional

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate 2 hours before serving. *Serves 10*

Patricia Glandorf • Williamsburg
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

OAT BURGERS

- 1 cup creamy cottage cheese
- 1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed
- 1 cup quick oatmeal
- 2 eggs
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- oil
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1¼ cans milk or water

Mix cottage cheese, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, salt and pepper. Form into patties and brown in oil. Mix soup and milk or water, then cover patties with the soup mixture. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Cream of mushroom soup can be substituted with cream of celery soup. *Serves 2-4*

Natalie Herrington • Nevada
Consumers Energy

CARIBBEAN RICE AND BEANS

- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ cup green onion, diced
- ½ cup green pepper, diced
- ½ teaspoon rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup raw rice, cooked
- ¼ cup picante sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, grated

In a skillet, sauté oil, garlic powder, green onion, green pepper, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Add beans to sautéed ingredients. Then, add rice, picante and soy sauce. Stir fry until hot, then top with cheese. *Serves 4*

Sandra Busard • Donnellson
Access Energy Cooperative

BLACK BEAN AND VEGGIE BURGERS

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- ¼ cup green pepper, finely chopped
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 large carrot, grated
- ¼ cup red onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 6 buns, optional
- lettuce, optional

In a large mixing bowl, mash black beans. Add garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt and cilantro. Mix until combined. Add peppers, breadcrumbs, carrot, onion and egg to the combined bean mixture. Form into patties and fry over medium heat in a greased pan. Flip after 5 minutes and fry the other side for the same amount of time. Serve on a bun or on a bed of lettuce. *Serves 6*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville
Access Energy Cooperative

HOMEMADE SLOW COOKER TOMATO BASIL SOUP

- 5-7 tomatoes on the vine (or 2 cups baby tomatoes)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- splash of vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- fresh basil, to taste
- heavy cream, optional

Place all ingredients in a slow cooker, except basil. Cook on low until tomatoes and onions are soft. Blend soup until smooth with an immersion or regular blender. Adding heavy cream will make for creamier soup. Adjust seasonings to taste and garnish with fresh basil before serving. *Serves 6, approximately*

Tristen Jungers • Archer
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

SPAGHETTI SALAD

- 4 medium fresh tomatoes
- 1 large red onion
- 2 cucumbers
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 pounds spaghetti
- 1 16-ounce bottle Wishbone Italian salad dressing
- Shilling Salad Supreme Spice, to taste

Chop together tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and peppers. Break spaghetti into thirds and boil until cooked. Cool slightly but add salad dressing before spaghetti is cold. Mix spaghetti with tomato mixture and add salad spice to taste. *Serves 16, or cut recipe in half to serve 8*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



EASY PEASY PAELLA

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup white rice
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
- 1 bell pepper (any color), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pinches saffron, optional
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- sprinkle cayenne
- 1 cup white wine or vegetable broth
- 8 ounces grape tomatoes
- ½ cup green olives
- 1 cup frozen peas
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Swirl oil to coat an 11-inch cast iron or other oven-safe pan. Layer (in order) rice, onion, carrots, celery, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic, seasonings and wine or broth. Bake at 375 degrees F for 40 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, olives and peas. Bake 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

WANTED:

BEEF BURGER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Jan. 31

Fire up the grill, load up the toppings and gather around the picnic table – we want your best **beef burger recipes!** Selected submissions will appear in our May issue in celebration of Beef Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322



Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participates in shooting the national commercial.



IOWA CO-OPS SHINE BRIGHT IN NEW TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMERCIAL

Hollywood came to Butler County in northeast Iowa this past summer in the form of Harvest Creative Services (Harvest) from Lansing, Michigan.

Butler County REC was chosen as the host cooperative for the Touchstone Energy® Cooperative's annual ad shoot, which took place in June. Before the shoot, however, there were numerous phone calls, emails – 825 in total – meetings, text messages and a week in May scouting locations for the five scenes.

Behind the scenes of a major production

Anne Gardiner, public relations specialist with Butler County REC, and Marena Fritzler, marketing

director with Corn Belt Power Cooperative, spent the week with Harvest. It was a full week that included new opportunities, making grilled cheese sandwiches for one scene, shooting scenes numerous times (the first scene alone took 31 takes), making last-minute adjustments, long days and short nights, and a lot of camaraderie.

Cooperation among cooperatives on full display

The ad was also a nod to cooperation among cooperatives, one of our seven cooperative principles. The first scene was shot at Grundy County REC with lineman Derek Snakenberg driving the REC truck. Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

sent three volunteers – Ryan Craig, CEO and Touchstone Energy board member; Katie Harris, communications specialist; and Jen Sievert, vice president of customer and corporate relations.

“It was an epic, one-of-a-kind experience, learning from the production crew on set, photographing the journey, and helping behind the scenes,” said Fritzler. “The magic of this creation came to life the way it did with the collective strength of many. It was neat to see local employees and board members from Butler County REC, Grundy County REC and Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative step up and into this production.”

Creativity, improvisation and a memorable experience

Interestingly, appliance finishes ultimately determined the filming location for the kitchen scene. A couple of Butler County REC employees offered their own kitchens for filming, but during location scouting, the production team determined the finishes and reflections in co-op employees' refrigerator doors when opened were not the right fit for the envisioned transition into the hand-drawn bucket truck. Production crews found the winning refrigerator in a local rental property in Shell Rock, where the kitchen scene was filmed.

Improvising is also a hallmark of ad shoots. When the Harvest team was searching for a table for the kitchen scene, Gardiner offered her kitchen table. Fritzier and Gardiner disassembled the table to get it through doors, loaded it onto an REC truck, covered it due to impending rain and headed to the scene, where the crew unloaded it. After the scene was shot, the table was loaded back onto the truck and covered with a tarp. Rain was definitely on its way.

Fritzier and Gardiner then went back and forth on whether the table should be housed at Butler County REC's CEO Craig Codner's home or driven back to Gardiner's home. They decided to drive the table to Gardiner's and unload it. The decision proved to be the correct one — it sprinkled, but the table remained unscathed.

The ad, released during the Touchstone Energy annual meeting on Nov. 19, is the centerpiece of Touchstone's 2026 national campaign, "The Cooperative Advantage." With more than 100 co-op members, employees and actors, this was Touchstone Energy's largest production to date. It also has the distinction of being the only ad in eight years in which shooting days had to change to accommodate weather.

"Touchstone Energy and Harvest Creative Services were great to work with," Gardiner said. "Butler County REC was proud to be the host for the 2026 ad campaign. It was an amazing opportunity that we are so grateful to have been a part of. I learned so much and had the best time. I also don't look at commercials or movies the same way I used to!"



Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperatives

ABOUT TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

Touchstone Energy is a national network of electric cooperatives across 46 states that provides research, communications resources and employee training to help co-ops strengthen relationships with their members. These shared tools and programs support superior member satisfaction, reinforce the cooperative difference and strengthen both local communities and the broader electric cooperative network. Touchstone Energy cooperatives stand out as trusted, reliable sources of power and information for 30 million member-consumers.

WHY DOES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY ADVERTISE?

Advertising is important for Touchstone Energy because it strengthens the unified national brand shared by hundreds of local electric cooperatives, helping members recognize the value, reliability and community focus of their co-op. It communicates the "cooperative difference," reinforces trust, and educates the public on key energy issues, while also helping attract new talent by highlighting the meaningful, community-driven careers available within the cooperative network. By keeping co-ops visible, consistent and connected, advertising supports member engagement, strengthens workforce recruitment and ensures that Touchstone Energy cooperatives continue to be seen as trusted, people-first energy providers.



Scan the QR code to watch the 30-second spot.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH OPERATION ROUND UP

Join **Operation Round Up**® and help support local individuals, families, nonprofits and community projects. By opting in, your monthly electric bill will be rounded up to the nearest dollar, with the extra cents making a big impact in our community.

Return this form by clipping and mailing it to:

Franklin REC, PO Box 437, Hampton, IA 50441

Or email to: contact-frec@franklinrec.coop

Prefer to sign up online? Visit www.franklinrec.coop/operation-round-0

Name: _____

Account Number: _____

Service Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Phone Number: _____

YES, I want to participate in Operation Round Up! By signing below, I authorize Franklin REC to round up my monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. I understand that I can opt out at any time by contacting Franklin REC.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Are you part of an organization that could benefit from Operation Round Up?

Operation Round Up funds are available to **nonprofits, community organizations and individuals** in need of financial assistance for projects or initiatives that benefit our local communities. If your organization could use support, we encourage you to apply for funding.

Learn more and apply at: www.franklinrec.coop/operation-round-0

Questions? Call Franklin REC at **641-456-2557**.



FRANKLIN REC 2026 BOARD OF DIRECTOR BUSINESS MEETING DATES

Franklin REC has announced its 2026 board of directors' business meeting dates. Meetings are held at the Franklin REC office, 1560 HWY 65, Hampton, Iowa, beginning at 1 p.m.

Please note that meeting dates and times are subject to change. Members who wish to attend a board meeting are encouraged to contact General Manager/CEO Garrett Thompson at 641-456-2557 at least five business days in advance.

These meetings provide an opportunity for members to stay informed about cooperative operations and board activities, supporting the transparency and engagement that are central to Franklin REC's mission.

- Tuesday, Jan. 27
- Tuesday, Feb. 24
- Tuesday, March 24
- Tuesday, April 21
 - Franklin REC's Business-Only Annual Meeting
- Tuesday, May 26
- Tuesday, June 23
- Tuesday, July 28
- Tuesday, Aug. 25
- Tuesday, Sept. 29
- Tuesday, Oct. 27
- Tuesday, Nov. 24
- Tuesday, Dec. 22

UNDERSTANDING A GROWING INDUSTRY IN OUR OWN BACKYARD: BITCOIN MINING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

In today's ever-changing world of technology, industries that once seemed distant or abstract are now playing a growing role in rural communities like ours. One of those industries is bitcoin mining. While the topic often makes national headlines, it might surprise some to learn that this innovative work is happening right here in Franklin County.

Ten years ago, many viewed Bitcoin as little more than "Monopoly money," a digital trend that might fade away. But as technology has evolved, so has the demand for secure, decentralized digital currency. As industries evolve, Franklin REC continues to learn alongside our members. The addition of bitcoin mining business within our service territory allows us to better understand emerging technologies and the impact they may have on energy use nationwide.

To shed light on how bitcoin mining works, we visited with a local entrepreneur who operates Wilson Bit Mining LLC out of Franklin County.

What is bitcoin mining?

The blockchain needs people (miners) to check transactions and lock them in safely. This requires expensive



computers and electricity. Bitcoin is the payment miners receive for doing that work. Without this work, the blockchain would not stay secure or reliable. The blockchain needs to be secured so no one can alter, fake or reverse transactions, keeping the entire system trustworthy. With bitcoin mining, computers race to solve tough puzzles so they can securely record transactions and earn new bitcoins as digital currency.

What resources does a bitcoin mining company need?

One way to explain the resources needed for bitcoin mining is to use a farming analogy. With farming you have the seed, soil, chemicals, equipment and the farmer who puts

everything together and turns a tiny seed into something that feeds the world. With bitcoin mining, instead of a seed, you have a specialized computer. Instead of soil, you have electricity. Instead of chemicals, you have software. Instead of tractors, planters, combines and trucks you have power distribution units, circuit breakers, fans, wires and specialized "containers."

Who is Wilson Bit Mining LLC, and why are they in Franklin County, Iowa?

Wilson Bit Mining is a local family-owned operation with the owners living in the area and engaging with the community. The company selected Franklin County because of the abundant energy resources and pro-business atmosphere.

KEEP A CLEAR PATH TO FRANKLIN REC EQUIPMENT

Franklin REC would like to remind you as winter continues to please keep a clear path to all Franklin REC equipment at your service location. Per Franklin REC's tariff, it is the duty of the member-consumer to allow and maintain proper access to all Franklin REC equipment year-round. By obstructing the pathways to any pole or equipment, our linemen are unable to perform routine maintenance work necessary to ensure reliable service to your location. If your service location is impacted by a power outage

requiring Franklin REC linemen to dispatch to this location, we may not be able to make the necessary repairs until a pathway is clear and safe. Section 6.2.2 of the Franklin REC tariff provides that electric service may be disconnected for failure of the member-consumer to permit the Cooperative reasonable access to the Cooperative's equipment. We would prefer not to have to exercise this right.

To ensure the safety of our linemen and provide you, our member, the

best service possible, Franklin REC respectfully requests that you remove any and all items attached to or located near any Franklin REC equipment installed on your property. If you have any questions about this request, please contact the office at 641-456-2557.



DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION KEEPS POWER FLOWING, OUTAGES AT BAY

BY CATHY CASH

Staying online uninterrupted by a power glitch seems more important than ever. And today, it's even more possible than ever before, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation, also known as DA, refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics-enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment and generation facilities in real time.

Equipped with these DA tools, Iowa's electric cooperatives can detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crew to repair the damaged powerlines.

"Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today's world demands it most," said Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a "self-healing electric grid" because its application, such as fault location, isolation and service restoration (FLISR), allows the network of power lines and substations to automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

How it works

When power lines are damaged or shortened by storms, critters or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



With distributed automation technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.



Distribution automation devices installed on a power pole bolster reliability and help members stay powered even during storms.



Distributed automation can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus such as transformers, substations and power lines.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatuses such as transformers, substations and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a co-op gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage and make repairs.

"Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network," said Singh. "With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability."

Knowledge is power

Without DA, a co-op may not know where electric vehicles, rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by its members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to any industry forecast. So, it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure or equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric co-ops can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups.

Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

WISHING YOU AN “AWE”SOME YEAR

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Remember when Iowa’s night sky offered breathtaking views on Veterans Day 2025? If you stepped outside on Nov. 11, you could see the northern lights shimmering across the horizon.

Like many other Iowans, I couldn’t resist taking pictures of this incredible phenomenon. Professional photographers and amateurs with smartphone cameras shared images online of the spectacle, with ribbons of red, green, pink and violet dancing above farms, small towns and city skylines.

The northern lights aren’t common in Iowa since we’re located too far south to regularly see the region where the lights are most visible. Seeing them in Iowa requires a strong geomagnetic storm to push the aurora far enough south and create an exceptionally vibrant display – a rare event.

In other words, it’s awesome.

“I couldn’t believe how vivid the northern lights were,” commented my friend Donetta Stewart of rural Auburn, who captured amazing views of the sky above her barn during the celestial show. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Every now and then, it’s soul satisfying to witness something that captures your sense of wonder once again.”

Make room for more awe and wonder

That word “wonder” resonated with me. It describes the magic inspired by a sense of awe.

What exactly is awe?

We’ve all experienced it, even if we didn’t know what to call it. Whether we’re enjoying a stunning sunset or watching a new leaf grow on a plant, the feeling we get in that moment – amazed, inspired, transported – is what researchers call awe.



Photo Source: Donetta Stewart, Sac County



Photo Source: Lynn Poen, Lake City



Photo Source: Darcy Dougherty Maulsby, Yetter

“I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how it’s important to make room and opportunity for awe and wonder in your life, especially as we get older,” Donetta told me. “I constantly remind myself of how it is a privilege to see the passing years. Many I know didn’t get to do that.”

She’s exactly right. Awe is a rich blessing. It’s a gentle nudge to appreciate the everyday wonders flourishing all around us. It’s something we all need more of in our lives.

Like many positive emotions, awe makes us feel good. It helps us connect with others. Awe decreases stress levels, and it increases generosity and kindness. Awe also makes us happier and more satisfied with life.

“Everything is a miracle”

Research shows that awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to a sense that we’re a part of a community, a culture, an ecosystem. Thanks to awe, “our individual self gives way to the boundary-dissolving sense of being part of something much larger,” noted Dacher Keltner, author of the book “Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life.”

Finding ways to cultivate awe in everyday life leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.

- Slow down and focus on your senses. Tune into the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds around you, from the flavors of a delicious meal to the delight of listening to a favorite song.
- Spend time in nature. Notice the vastness of the sky, the beauty of trees and flowers, and the way the sunlight sparkles on a river or lake. Even observing nature from a window can help.
- Document the beauty around you. Write down things you notice that bring you joy, or take some photographs, just like many of us did with the northern lights.

This year, make time to nurture a sense of awe, and take inspiration in this quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family’s Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

Visit our website at www.franklinrec.coop



SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**.

From the ongoing training of our lineworkers
to classroom safety programs for our kids.

Our commitment to electrical safety has always been job one.
So, we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's
why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives