

FEBRUARY 2025

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Guthrie County REC annual
meeting highlights**

**Forces shaping the rural
economy in 2025**

Cherry recipes to love

Youth Tour is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity ▶ See Page 12

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Mary Bumann, a North West REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

PROTECTING ELECTRIC SERVICE TERRITORY IS OUR TOP 2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

BY ETHAN HOHENADEL



At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), the start of a new year also means the start of a new legislative session as we advocate

for our member cooperatives and the member-consumers they serve.

Iowa's 91st General Assembly began on Jan. 13 and our policy and advocacy team is already hard at work. Protecting electric service territory is our top legislative priority this session.

In Iowa, your location determines which electric utility will serve your home, farm or business under the defined electric service territory law. For almost 50 years, these electric service areas have benefited electric co-op member-consumers as the law provides certainty to electric cooperatives so we can safeguard affordable rates, support a resilient electric grid and invest in economic development.

Service territory changes jeopardize economic development

Weakening Iowa's electric service territory law jeopardizes electric cooperatives' investments in rural economic development, which would negatively impact the communities we serve.

For the five years ending in 2022, Iowa electric co-ops had an impressive \$4.7 billion impact in economic development projects. These investments supported more than 7,300 Iowa jobs (retained, attracted or expanded) during that same time period.

In 2023 alone, Iowa electric co-ops secured more than \$41 million in federal economic development funds, resulting in more than \$111 million of new capital investment in the state.

Decades of robust economic development efforts from electric cooperatives have improved quality of life throughout rural Iowa through local job

creation, providing needed services and adding valuable tax revenue. Without electric service territory protections, these rural economic development efforts will be severely diminished.

Reduced electric service territory protections will increase rates

The realities of eroding electric service territory protections are sobering. In other states where service territories have been eliminated, consumers have experienced **higher** electric rates and **decreased** reliability.

According to a 2023 *New York Times* investigation, electric rates have **increased** in deregulated states. The report concludes, "Deregulation has resulted in increased rates/fees in every state where it has been introduced." And, "On average, residents living in a deregulated market pay \$40 more per month for electricity ..." Referencing an American Public Power Association 2021 report, "The average electric rate is **28% higher** in deregulated states, as compared to traditionally regulated states."

Reduced electric service territory protections will decrease reliability

Our analysis of publicly available industry data shows that electric

reliability is **lower** in deregulated Midwestern states compared to Iowa. From 2018-2023, **electric outages in Iowa were 65% shorter on average** compared to deregulated Midwestern states. During that same time period, **Iowans experienced 20% fewer outages** than deregulated Midwestern states. This analysis comes from EIA-861 SAIDI (System Average Interruption Duration Index) and SAIFI (System Average Interruption Frequency Index) data from Iowa, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio and includes major weather events.

Protecting the interests of co-op member-consumers

Weakening service territory protections is unacceptable for Iowa's electric cooperatives and the members we serve. Your locally owned electric co-op supports Iowa's defined electric service territory law and opposes efforts to undermine it, which reduce consumer protections. Learn more about this important issue at www.ProtectRuralIowa.com.

Ethan Hohenadel is the director of policy and advocacy for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN AN AMAZON KINDLE!

Meet the lightest and most compact Kindle, now with enhanced display features and faster page turns. The front light is 25% brighter at max setting, now as bright as Kindle Paperwhite. With the adjustable front light and dark mode, read effortlessly any time of day on the 6-inch glare-free 300 ppi display.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Feb. 28. 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 the Ember Smart Mug from the December issue was **Dawn Dubbelde**, a **Lyon REC** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY FEB. 28!

CEO ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

BY COZY NELSEN



The following is a transcript of comments made during the CEO report to the membership during the Guthrie County REC annual meeting on Jan. 4.

Don't miss your opportunity, apply today for the 2025 Guthrie County REC Scholarship!

Deadline:
APRIL 4

www.guthrie-rec.coop/scholarships



Guthrie County REC accomplished much in 2024, including the installation of a new Honeywell Automatic Meter Information (AMI) system that includes outage and mapping features. We also finally began construction on the two new substations: Mockingbird and Bluejay.

We faced industry challenges: delays in receiving electric construction materials, delays in purchasing any utility vehicles and significant cost escalations. With two years of negative operating margins, the board of directors, following my recommendation, began the process to implement a rate increase. This decision was not taken lightly.

To determine the percentage for the increase, we hired Power System Engineering to prepare three important documents for us: the revenue requirement, the cost of service and rate designs.

The revenue requirement is the determination of revenue needed to meet our lenders' loan covenants (usually an operating TIER of 1.20), revenue needed to meet our

operational expenses, to meet the construction work plan and any capital expenditures.

The cost of service is the determination of revenue produced by each of Guthrie County REC's rate classes so that there is no, or minimal, cross subsidization between each one.

Rate design is the final rate structure that we will apply to achieve our financial goals.

It is premature to tell you what the percent increase will be; we should have that information by early spring. Guthrie County REC has not had a distribution rate increase since November 2001, so please know that we – the board of directors, employees and I – are being diligent in understanding all aspects of this change and particularly the burden on our membership.

Please contact me should you have any further questions concerning this matter.

Cozy Nelsen is the CEO of Guthrie County REC.



Guthrie County REC

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



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www.guthrie-rec.coop

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The power Guthrie County REC provides is much more than a way to keep the lights on. It plugs into the family, friends, and neighbors that make up your local co-op.



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ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

More than 260 members turned out Saturday, Jan. 4 for the Guthrie County REC annual meeting.

Board Member Don Schwartz started the meeting by providing an invocation. Vice President Joni Rees then introduced co-op employees, retired employees, retired board directors and special guests in attendance. Secretary/Treasurer Julie Kiley then gave the treasurer’s report, followed by CEO Cozy Nelsen’s report (see article on Page 4).

Youth Tour 2024 participant Lucas Obert shared experiences from his trip to Washington, D.C., last June, and former Guthrie County REC Youth Tour representatives from 1971, Kathleen Deal and Dave McCool, spoke about their experiences and the importance of encouraging local youth to apply for

the opportunity. Board President Steve Bireline closed the program with his report on Guthrie County REC’s power supplier Central Iowa Power Cooperative (CIPCO).

If you were unable to attend the annual meeting, please visit www.guthrie-rec.coop/annual-meeting to view the 2024 Guthrie County REC Annual Report. The following are some of the highlights from the meeting.

Election results

Ballots were accepted until 12:30 p.m. Jan. 4 and counted by the cooperative attorney, Denny Puckett. The certified results are:

- **District 1:** Julie Kiley, incumbent
- **District 2:** Jim Mazour, incumbent
- **District 3:** Ronny Bristle, incumbent

A board reorganization meeting was held following the annual meeting with the following results:

- **President:** Steve Bireline
- **Vice President:** Joni Rees
- **Secretary/Treasurer:** Julie Kiley
- **Assistant Secretary/Treasurer:** Ronny Bristle
- **Representative on the CIPCO board of directors:** Steve Bireline

Milestone recognitions

The cooperative uses the annual meeting to acknowledge and celebrate employees and board members who have achieved service milestones. This year, the following individuals were honored:

- Lori Hix, office manager: 30 years
- Rebecca Schwartz, communications: 10 years

PRIZE WINNERS

GRAND PRIZE

Electric Grill Cart: Charlie Bilbrey, Panora

The following are some of the winners of additional prizes from a random drawing of names of attendees.

- **Faberware Single Flip Waffle Maker:** Anna Marie and Jeff Nielsen, Exira
- **Crock-Pot Slow Cooker:** Roslin Klockentager, Panora
- **\$25 American Express gift card:** Carrie and Scott Bird, Panora
- **Ninja Fit Blender:** Michele Crabbs, Redfield

Plan now to attend the next annual meeting in January 2026!



Lori Hix (left) and Rebecca Schwartz were honored for service anniversaries.



HOW ELECTRIC CO-OPS ARE PREPARING FOR THE FAST-GROWING DEMAND FOR ELECTRICITY

BY SCOTT FLOOD

The demand for electric power continues to increase, and America's peak demand is forecast to grow by 38 gigawatts through 2029 – the equivalent of adding another California-sized state to the nation's power grid. At the same time, power producers plan to retire more than 110 gigawatts of baseload, or always-available, generation by 2033.

When demand outpaces supply of any commodity – corn, gasoline or electricity for example – prices tend to increase. In addition, there's increasing concern about the potential for rolling outages as power providers struggle to meet peak demands.

Local co-op members may not notice the impact of the supply and demand imbalance for some time, but it's captured the attention of electric co-op directors and their staffs.

"The leadership at many electric co-ops is seeing unprecedented growth in demand," explains Stephanie Crawford, regulatory affairs director for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

A decade ago, a huge commercial project might boost a co-op's total load by 20 or 30 megawatts. "Now they're getting multiple requests for projects in the hundreds of megawatts," she adds.

AI and cloud computing are driving demand

Artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing are key drivers of this added demand. As use of AI skyrockets and a greater share of computer applications and storage migrate to the cloud, all that data needs to be stored somewhere. Data centers, which are massive groups of high-capacity computer servers, provide the most efficient way to handle it.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, data centers can consume as much as 50 times the energy per floor space of other types of commercial buildings. A single large data center may use over 100 megawatts of power, the equivalent of powering 80,000 homes. Data centers already account for nearly 2% of the nation's electricity use, and the Electric

Power Research Institute predicts that will grow to 9% by 2030.

"It's not only a question of needing to build or obtain more capacity, but in many cases, also creates questions about the availability of transmission and distribution," Crawford notes.

Data centers can significantly benefit local economies by creating high-paying jobs during construction and operation, generating substantial tax revenue, attracting related tech industries, boosting local infrastructure development, and stimulating demand for local services like security and maintenance, effectively creating a ripple effect through the community.

Co-ops focus on knowledge and relationships

For electric co-ops, the efforts fall into two categories: increasing knowledge and building relationships. A generation ago, power supply discussions were fairly straightforward for co-op directors, given the widespread availability of baseload generation. Today's directors increasingly find themselves learning about sophisticated and challenging issues as they weigh decisions affecting their co-op's operations and financial viability for years to come.

Co-ops have long emphasized relationship-building, and Crawford stresses that will continue with companies developing large projects such as data centers.

"Early and frequent conversations between the co-op and the entities seeking additional energy are critical," she explains. "That includes honest conversations about the costs and timelines involved."

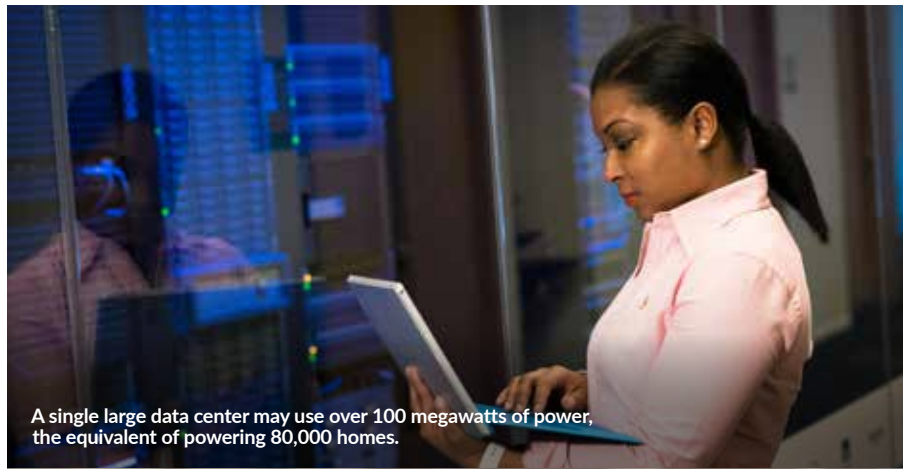
For example, while a data center project might ultimately need a significant supply of megawatts, if its operations are phased in gradually over several years, the co-op may have additional time to prepare for the maximum load. They might consider creating a partnership with the project owner to develop new generation assets on the project's site, reducing transmission concerns.

Reliability is a cornerstone

The large tech companies involved in deploying data centers and similar projects are highly sophisticated and well-resourced. They tend to be less interested in obtaining the lowest cost and are more focused on reliability.

"What we're hearing from co-ops is that the companies building data centers typically have done their homework before they start talking to co-ops," Crawford says.

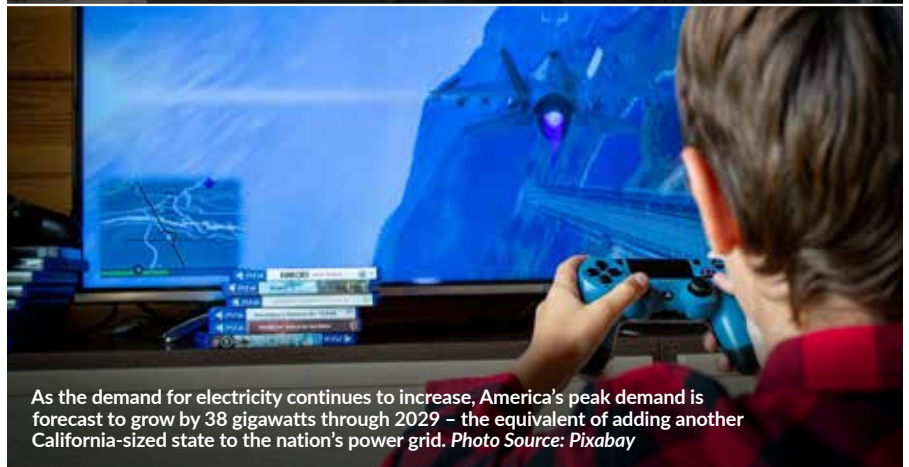
While the developers may be ready to pay for the substantial infrastructure upgrades needed to serve their data centers, she notes that the conversations may end up



A single large data center may use over 100 megawatts of power, the equivalent of powering 80,000 homes.



Today's co-op directors increasingly find themselves learning about sophisticated and challenging issues as they weigh decisions affecting their co-op's operations and financial viability for years to come.



As the demand for electricity continues to increase, America's peak demand is forecast to grow by 38 gigawatts through 2029 - the equivalent of adding another California-sized state to the nation's power grid. Photo Source: Pixabay

focusing more on project timelines and data center obligations to remain as co-op member-consumers. In addition to supply chain issues related to transformers and other components that are in increasingly short supply, projects may face regulatory delays at all levels.

While co-ops prepare for projects from organizations new to the co-op, Crawford notes the importance co-op leaders also place on keeping a finger on the pulse of their existing commercial accounts.

"Being proactive and reaching out to understand how a commercial account's energy needs may be changing in the coming years informs conversations and decisions about timing, rate design and other factors, even if they're not making specific requests yet," she says. "That helps the co-op serve emerging needs while protecting the reliability for all of its members."

Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Cherry Recipes

TO LOVE



CLASSIC SOUR CREAM CHEESECAKE

- 1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
- ¼ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup margarine or butter, melted
- 3 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
- 1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 3 eggs
- ¼ cup lemon juice from concentrate
- 1 8-ounce container sour cream
- 1 21-ounce can cherry pie filling, chilled

Combine crumbs, sugar and margarine or butter. Press firmly on bottom of 9-inch springform pan. In large mixing bowl, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually beat in sweetened condensed milk until smooth. Beat in eggs, then lemon juice and sour cream. Pour into prepared pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 50-55 minutes or until lightly browned around the edges, the center will be slightly soft. Cool and refrigerate. Top with cherry pie filling before serving. Refrigerate leftovers.

Ruth Seehusen • Greene
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

QUICK CHERRY DESSERT

- 1 package chocolate pudding
- 1 can cherry pie filling
- whipped topping, optional

Prepare pudding and mix with cherry pie filling. Top with a dollop of whipped topping, if desired. Serves 8

Darlene Thomas • Somers
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

CHERRY CRUNCH CAKE

- 1 chocolate cake mix
- 2 eggs
- 1 21-ounce can cherry pie filling
- ¾ cup nuts, chopped
- ¾ cup chocolate chips
- ½ cup brown sugar

Mix cake mix, eggs and pie filling. Pour in a greased 9x13-inch pan. Sprinkle nuts, chocolate chips and brown sugar over top. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30-35 minutes. Serves 15-20

Carma Mack • Audubon
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

CHERRY WINE BALLS

- 3 cups vanilla wafers, finely crushed
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 1 cup pecans or walnuts, finely chopped
- ¼ cup cocoa
- ½ cup cherry wine
- ¼ cup light corn syrup
- granulated sugar, as needed

Mix wafers, powdered sugar, nuts and cocoa. Stir in wine and corn syrup, then shape into 1-inch balls. Roll wine balls in granulated sugar. Cover tightly and refrigerate several days before serving. These are easy to make in a food processor. Yields 5 dozen

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



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

INDIVIDUAL CHERRY CHEESECAKES

- 3 8-ounce cream cheese packages, room temperature
- 1¼ cups white sugar, divided
- 5 large eggs
- 1¾ teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 can cherry pie filling

Cream the cream cheese and 1 cup sugar together. Add eggs one at a time, beating well. Add 1½ teaspoons vanilla, then pour cream cheese mixture into foil-lined muffin tins, filling each ¾ full. Bake at 300 degrees F for 40 minutes. These will not brown. Meanwhile, mix sour cream, ¼ cup sugar and ¼ teaspoon vanilla. Once cheesecakes have baked, cool for about 4 minutes. Then add a small spoonful of sour cream topping and a dab of cherry pie filling to each. Bake for 5 more minutes. Remove from oven, cool, then refrigerate. These can be frozen. *Yields 24 cheesecakes*

Kathy Grote • Wall Lake
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

CHERRY COFFEE CAKE

- 1 cup margarine
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 can cherry pie filling

Cream margarine, sugar and eggs. Add vanilla and dry ingredients. Spread batter on bottom of a 12x18-inch jelly roll pan prepared with cooking spray. Drop pie filling on batter by spoonful, swirl with knife. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes, no longer or the cake will get too dry. *Serves 24*

Anita Destival • Sumner
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

TROPICAL SMOOTHIE

- 1½ cups lemonade
- ½ cup frozen mango chunks
- ½ cup frozen pineapple chunks
- 1 cup frozen cherries
- ½-1 cup sugar

Mix all ingredients in blender. *Serves 2*

Bethany Van Wyhe • Lester
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CHERRY MARASCHINO BARS

- 1¼ cups flour, divided
- ½ cup butter or margarine
- 3 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¾ cup chopped nuts, optional
- ½ cup coconut
- ½ cup or more red maraschino cherries, drained and diced

Combine 1 cup flour, butter or margarine and powdered sugar. Blend well and spread in a buttered 8-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25 minutes. Meanwhile, combine sugar, eggs, ¼ cup flour, baking powder, salt and vanilla. Beat until smooth and well blended. Stir in chopped nuts, if desired, coconut and maraschino cherries. Spread on the baked crust layer and return to the oven for 25 minutes. Cool and cut into 2x2-inch bars. *Serves 16*

Twyla Godbersen • Arthur
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

WANTED:

CAMPING RECIPES

THE REWARD:
\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Feb. 28

Submit your favorite recipes to enjoy around the campfire. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes
Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
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COBANK: FORCES THAT WILL SHAPE THE U.S. RURAL ECONOMY

At the end of 2024, CoBank – one of the largest providers of credit to the U.S. rural economy – released its “2025 Year Ahead Report: Forces that will Shape the U.S. Rural Economy.”

The financial services firm says the U.S. continues to benefit from solid economic growth, low unemployment and moderating inflation. However, the outlook for the rural economy is more volatile and uncertain. Rural industries are disproportionately exposed to federal policy, and the outcome of the 2024 election cycle promises to bring significant changes in the federal government’s approach to everything from international trade and immigration to energy exploration and rural economic development.

According to the comprehensive report, the high level of policy uncertainty facing rural industries adds to their already long list of headwinds and challenges.

The CoBank 2025 outlook report examines several key factors that will shape agriculture and market sectors that serve rural communities throughout the U.S.

1 U.S. economy: A new economic era begins

Most economists are forecasting 2025 U.S. gross domestic product growth around 2.5%-3.0%, essentially the same as today. However, those forecasts are based on rather mild assumptions about forthcoming policy changes. When taken in isolation, President Trump’s proposed policies – tax cuts, decreased labor supply and tariffs on imported goods – are all inflationary. Consequently, longer-term interest rates have already edged higher, and the market has downshifted expectations for further federal rate cuts in 2025. There is a good chance the proposed tariffs and the crackdown on undocumented immigrants will be more disruptive than markets have priced in, particularly in industries like construction and agriculture.

2 U.S. agricultural economy: Trade war could send ag economy from bad to worse

The short-lived commodity boom precipitated by global droughts, the war in Ukraine and COVID-19 supply

issues is now a distant memory. Row crop prices are down nearly 50% from their 2022 highs. But production costs have remained elevated, and profitability has plunged to decade-plus lows. The silver lining is that dairy and livestock producers are generally profitable due to low feed costs and resilient consumer demand. However, more headwinds may be coming for both the crop and livestock sectors.

3 Grains, farm supply and biofuels: Policy uncertainty weighs on exports, biofuels

A strengthening U.S. dollar and the potential for trade disputes and record-large South American crops weigh heavily on the outlook for grain and oilseed prices in 2025. U.S. farmers are widely expected to struggle with further margin compression as weaker commodity prices test farmers’ ability to lower production costs. Crop input decisions will be evaluated much more closely with a focus on inputs that provide the greatest return on investment. The bearish outlook for oil prices diminishes the demand

picture for ethanol, biodiesel and renewable diesel. Uncertainty over U.S. biofuel policy under the new administration also clouds the demand outlook for biofuels.

4 Animal protein: Rising margins improve prospects for growth

Falling feed costs and rising producer margins have renewed expansion interest in animal protein segments. However, labor, construction and land costs remain elevated, tempering expectations for any meaningful supply growth in the near term. U.S. beef cow herd expansion is not expected to start until 2026 or 2027. The smaller herd will further support higher feeder and fed cattle prices in the coming year. With consumers now pushing back on beef prices that are already near historic highs, packer margins will remain under pressure well into 2025.

5 Dairy: Record investment will continue to grow the category

The U.S. will see an unprecedented \$8 billion in new dairy processing investment through 2026. Some of the new plants are poised to come online in 2025, with about half of the investment in the cheese category. The expected surge in cheese and whey output will likely put downward pressure on dairy product prices in the second half of the year. Sourcing additional milk supplies to fill new plant capacity is a looming question. 2023 and 2024 will go down as the first back-to-back years since the late 1960s that U.S. milk production

took a downturn. On the flip side, higher component levels in farmgate milk, largely butterfat and protein, have lifted finished product yields.

6 Food and beverage: Health and nutrition take center stage

The headline news for food, beverage and consumer packaged goods in 2025 is President Trump's nomination of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Kennedy's purported goals include eliminating ingredients banned in other countries and "getting the chemicals out" of America's food supply. Meanwhile, consumers' renewed focus on their health and the popularity of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs are showing signs of impacting food manufacturers. According to J.P. Morgan research, GLP-1 users purchase around 8% less food compared with average consumers. Food and beverage manufacturers' concerns about volume attrition are likely to continue well into 2025.

7 Power and energy: What an IRA rollback might look like

President Trump's return to the White House will signal a significant shift in U.S. energy policy. While he has promised to end the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), slowing the clean energy momentum that has accelerated under the IRA may be more difficult than imagined. Popular programs in the IRA have directed significant investments to many rural and economically distressed communities. And more than a dozen

House Republicans have voiced concern that repealing the IRA could jeopardize ongoing development in their communities. Clawing back IRA funds that have already been allocated could prove to be very difficult. The more likely scenario is that unallocated IRA funding will be redirected to other priorities.

8 Digital infrastructure: Rural connectivity faces new challenges

Political uncertainty and low participation in the Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program raises big questions for bridging the digital divide in the year ahead. The \$42.5 billion BEAD program, created by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, includes unprecedented government support. However, a lack of operator participation could blunt the impact of this well-intended program to bring reliable broadband access to underserved rural areas. Many small operators lack the specialized expertise or financial resources to meet some of the complicated BEAD requirements.



Scan the QR code to read the full report.



OBERT: YOUTH TOUR IS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

Lucas Obert, a senior at Coon Rapids-Bayard CSD, was a guest speaker at both the annual meeting of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives in December, and the Guthrie County REC annual meeting in early January.

Last June, Lucas participated in the electric cooperative Youth Tour, an annual opportunity for students from across the country to represent their hometown electric co-op on a free trip to Washington, D.C. Students use the trip to learn more about the electric cooperative business model, take in the sites, meet with Congressional delegates and more.

During the trip, Lucas was elected to represent all Iowa's electric cooperatives on the 2024 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Leadership Council. As part of his duties, he spoke about his experiences and the importance



Lucas Obert, fourth from left, is pictured with Guthrie County REC board members (from left): Ronny Bristle, Don Schwartz, Julie Kiley, Steve Bireline, Cozy Nelsen (CEO), Joni Rees and Michael Moore at the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperative's annual meeting in December.

of encouraging students to apply for Youth Tour during both annual meetings.

In March, Lucas will attend the NRECA Power Xchange and Tech Advantage meeting in Atlanta along with delegates from other states. While there, he will have a hands-on experience with many facets of the meeting, including the resolutions

process and helping NRECA members communicate with their legislators.

Additionally, two attendees of the 1971 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour spoke during the Guthrie County REC annual meeting. Kathleen Deal and Dave McCool spoke about their experiences and encouraged students to apply.

7 ENERGY-SAVING WAYS TO SHOW YOU CARE THIS VALENTINE'S DAY

Spend your money wisely this Valentine's Day by splurging on flowers and candy, not your electric bill! Here are a few ways you can save during the holiday (or any time):

Date night

Get prepped. Assemble all your ingredients and do all your chopping and prepping before you turn on your electric cooking appliances.

Take it slow. Make someone special in your life a meal in a slow cooker, which is more energy efficient than using the oven.

Don't forget the ambient lighting.

Battery-powered candles can set the mood by adding a warm glow and not adding to your electric bill.

Family night

Get comfortable. Plan for energy-efficient comfort all evening long by adjusting ceiling fans to run clockwise, circulating warm air from the ceiling. That will allow you to lower your thermostat a few degrees. And don't use kitchen exhaust fans or vents for more than 20 minutes. They pull cold air from outside.



Stream efficiently. Stream your favorite movies or shows through your digital media player rather than your gaming console and use volume-leveling to make sure that loud commercials don't interrupt your family time.

Get crafty. Create tasty valentines for the whole family with no-bake desserts.

Night out

Get smart. Enjoy energy-efficient nights out all year long by installing a smart thermostat. You'll save energy while you're out and keep the house warm and cozy.

FIREPLACE EFFICIENCY: MAXIMIZE WARMTH AND MINIMIZE WASTE

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

When I was little, I remember my dad telling me that some nights were too cold to have a fire. That always seemed crazy to me, but like many other things he said, he was right.

A heat pump heated our home. We had an open fireplace that was more suited for ambiance than creating heat. When you have a fire, warm air rises and draws the smoke out through the chimney. This also draws the warm air out of the house. This invisible force is called the stack effect.

The impact is exacerbated in drafty homes. When the warm air escapes through the chimney, it is replaced by cool air leaking in through gaps and cracks in the home. The greater the difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the greater the stack effect, hence Dad's rule of no fires on the coldest nights.

Wood fireplaces are not an efficient option to heat your home. Most of the heat goes out of the chimney. If you enjoy the comforting ambiance and curling up in front of the fireplace during the colder months, there are some ways to effectively use a fireplace in your home.

Tips to efficiently operate a fireplace

Because it is out of sight, it can be easy to forget to close the chimney damper. The damper should be open when you have a fire going or when any hot ashes are in the fireplace to ensure smoke and carbon monoxide don't come into your home. Once the fire and all ashes are fully extinguished, close the damper. Leaving the damper open allows warm air to escape, wasting energy. It's like leaving a window open when your heating system is turned on in the winter.

If your damper doesn't close properly or your chimney doesn't have one,



If your two- and four-legged family members enjoy curling up in front of the fire, be sure to lock in comfort and savings by efficiently operating the fireplace in your home.

purchase a product designed for the task. There are a variety of chimney plug sizes and styles available, including inflatable options designed to fit snugly in place. While you are at the hardware store, pick up some caulking and weatherstripping to seal air leaks around windows, doors and pipes along exterior walls.

Fireplaces with gas logs are required to be installed with a mechanism that always keeps the damper open. This safety feature allows gases from the pilot light to escape. Glass doors can reduce the impact of air leakage in the winter and summer months. Consider installing glass doors on open fireplaces and keep them closed to minimize drafts.

Sealed combustion gas fireplaces are fully enclosed systems that draw the air needed for combustion from the outside. When properly installed, you get the benefit of the warmth of the fire without the worry of heat loss from drafts. If you have gas logs and enjoy the ease of a gas



If your damper doesn't close properly or your chimney doesn't have one, buy a chimney plug to keep cold air from entering and warm air from escaping your home.

fireplace, consider upgrading to a sealed combustion unit.

Consider the options

Woodstoves and pellet stoves are additional options that provide more heat than wood or gas fireplaces. Federal tax credits are available for high-efficiency biomass stoves. A credit of 30% of the project cost – including the cost of installation up to a maximum of \$2,000 – is available for products purchased and installed between Jan. 1, 2023, and Dec. 31, 2032. The unit must have a thermal efficiency rating of 75% or more. Visit www.energystar.gov for more information.

If you have a woodstove, fireplace or any fuel-burning appliance in your home, be sure to install and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can be harmful or even deadly if not detected.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

HOW TO SAFELY USE A GENERATOR

Before using a portable generator, it's essential to understand the potential dangers associated with using them, such as their production of carbon monoxide (CO). CO is an odorless, colorless and tasteless poisonous gas that is called the "silent killer" because it is virtually undetectable without the use of technology like CO alarms. Follow these tips when using a generator.

1 Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator. Be sure you understand the directions before hooking up the generator.

2 A generator is a temporary power source. It should never be used as a permanent solution.

3 Maintain adequate ventilation because generators emit CO.

It's against fire code to operate a generator in your home, garage or other enclosed building. Place it in a dry location outdoors.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends generators be positioned at least 20 feet from doors, windows and vents to prevent CO from entering the home.

4 Never plug a portable electric generator into a wall outlet or connect directly to a home's wiring. This can energize utility power lines and injure you or others working nearby. Electrical back feed can also damage the generator and home electrical equipment.

5 Turn off the generator and allow cooling before refueling.

Gasoline and its vapors may ignite if they come in contact with hot components or an electric spark. Store fuel in a properly designed container in a secure location away from the generator or other fuel-burning appliances, such as water heaters. Always have a fully charged, approved fire extinguisher located nearby.



6 Protect your appliances. Turn off or disconnect all appliances and lights before you begin operating the portable generator. Once the generator is running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Remember, generators are for temporary usage, so prioritize your needs.

7 Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions. Use a generator only when necessary when the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Make sure your hands are dry before touching the generator.

8 Keep children and pets away from portable generators at all times. Many generator components are hot enough to burn you during operation.

9 Use proper extension cords. Use only safety-tested, shop-type electrical cords designed and rated for heavier, outdoor use to connect appliances. Many generators are equipped with twist-lock connects to reduce the chance of accidental disconnections due to vibrations.

10 Shut down the generator properly. Before shutting down a generator, turn off and unplug all appliances and equipment being powered by the generator.

11 Remember maintenance between uses. Drain the gasoline from the generator while it is being stored. It's also a good idea to inspect the fuel and oil filters, spark plug, oil level and fuel quality, and to start the generator on a regular basis before an emergency situation happens.

For more information, visit [Safe Electricity at safeelectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org)

SERVING UP LASAGNA LOVE

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

During these cold winter days, nothing can brighten your day like classic comfort food. For me, that often means homemade lasagna.

Ahh ... lasagna! Layers of melted cheese piled on delectable meat and tender pasta, all smothered with a savory sauce that would bring tears to the most cynical Italian's eyes.

Did you know lasagna didn't originate in Italy? While its roots can be traced to ancient Greece, we can thank the ancient Romans for embracing – and refining – this culinary delight.

While I don't recall the first time I tried lasagna, I'm sure it was during my childhood. Perhaps I was influenced by Garfield the cat, the snarky comic strip character of the 1980s who was obsessed with this perfect pasta.

Becoming a lasagna chef

My love for lasagna reignited a few years ago when I was writing a newsletter for the Green Hills retirement community in Ames. As I interviewed a Green Hills newcomer about her hobbies, she mentioned she was a Lasagna Love volunteer. I'd never heard of this. Tell me more!

Lasagna Love is a simple, grassroots concept that took off during the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteers (called "Lasagna Chefs") cook and deliver homemade lasagnas to families in need within their local communities.

Families can request a meal without having to explain their situation. They're matched with a nearby volunteer chef, and the chef delivers the meal directly to their doorstep. The mission is to spread kindness and create a sense of community through food.

I was so intrigued that I signed up that same day at www.lasagnalove.org to become a Lasagna Chef. (Anyone can volunteer, by the way.) It wasn't long before Lasagna Love matched me with



a young, single mom in Auburn who was working and going back to school. I never met her (I simply dropped off the lasagna at her front door, as she requested), but it felt good to help someone in need.

Food is love made visible

As more matches came through Lasagna Love, I prepared and delivered homemade lasagnas to local families in Manson, Sac City, Lohrville and Rockwell City. Some recipients greeted me at the door and expressed their gratitude. One lady texted me after she baked and served the lasagna, informing me it was the best she'd ever eaten.

The more I participated in Lasagna Love, the more curious I became about the program's history. Rhiannon Menn, a mother and chef from the West Coast, saw that many of her fellow moms were struggling to manage stress, anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Facing her own feelings of helplessness, Menn decided she could cook.

She posted in two local Facebook groups offering a free homecooked meal and received seven replies. Menn

prepared seven pans of lasagna for people she didn't know, drove around San Diego and delivered these meals to strangers. That's how Lasagna Love was born.

Since then, Lasagna Love has grown into an international movement of kindness, impacting thousands of volunteers and recipient families each week. Sometimes those moments of kindness mean more than you know.

Around Thanksgiving 2024, I received a request to make lasagna for an older couple in Lake City. I've known these people my whole life and enjoyed an hour-long visit with them in their home after I dropped off their lasagna. A few weeks later, I was shocked to hear that the wife had suddenly passed away.

I was grateful I had the opportunity to serve this wonderful couple through Lasagna Love. I look forward to helping more families in the year ahead. Truly, food (especially lasagna) is love made visible.

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



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