



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

OCTOBER 2020



ENERGY IS INNOVATION

Earlier this year, Brandon Dingmann and his wife Jennifer, purchased the Dingmann family farm operation from his parents, Dave and Lynn. Learn how this family of innovators has built a new barn and implemented new technology solutions over the last few years to set the farm up for success well into the future.

After graduating from college in 2011, Brandon Dingmann came back to work full-time on the family farm. At the time, Dave was still working full-time away from the farm until he retired in 2013.

In 2014, Dave and Brandon started diversifying their farm. They added a chicken barn and expanded their cattle operation. They also started

growing specialty crops along with corn, soybeans and alfalfa.

In 2019, Brandon took over the existing chicken and cattle operations. In 2020, he purchased the farm from his dad. Today, Brandon and his brother Ben, along with their father, farm 1,100 acres of crops and raise 850 Holstein steers annually.

NEW BARN, NEW TECHNOLOGY

Farming comes with many challenges, but for Brandon, he enjoys hunting for the solution. "I've enjoyed the challenge of taking over the everyday farm operations over the last few years and I enjoy the uncertainty. I like to look at the problems we have and try to figure out the solutions," he said.

Electrifying some of the daily farm operations has been a beneficial solution.

About two years ago, Brandon had big plans to build a new steer barn. The new barn would include an automatic feeding and watering system, a new manure pit, and cameras to monitor the operation. Building began in March of 2020 and by the end of this month, the new steer barn will be fully operational.

"Instead of mixing separate batches of feed twice per day, I can now fill the feed bins any time of the day and rely on technology to do the rest," he said. "The computer will automatically feed the cattle three or four times per day.

Continued on pages 6 and 7.

CEO'S MESSAGE

WORKING THE PLAN AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE



At Stearns Electric Association, it seems like we are constantly planning. We plan, practice and prepare for extreme weather, emergency response scenarios, wholesale power purchases, and for our electrical system construction and maintenance work. And most importantly, we prepare an annual budget and financial forecast that ensures we remain financially stable.

BUDGET PLANNING

Right now at Stearns Electric, we are planning our budgets for 2021 and beyond. Our annual budget planning process is extensive but necessary. The budget provides a roadmap for the Cooperative to intentionally spend money on the items that are most important to Stearns Electric's operations. It is guided by the Cooperative's strategic plan. Employees from all Cooperative departments contribute to the overall proposed budget in October and November. In November, the Board of Directors extensively reviews the budget and proposes cuts and changes as needed. In December, once the adjustments are made, the Board approves the final budget.

POWER COSTS AND DEMAND SIDE MANAGEMENT

One of the key areas that we budget for is our wholesale power purchases. In 2020, Stearns Electric will spend over \$38 million purchasing wholesale power to distribute to our members. The majority of those purchases will be from Great River Energy (GRE). A

small portion of our power supply, about 5%, is hydropower produced by the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA).

At Stearns Electric, we are working hard to get the biggest bang for our buck when purchasing wholesale power for you. One way to reduce energy costs is through demand-side management programs. We have over 14,000 accounts signed up for the Cooperative's demand-side management programs, such as Dual Fuel, Stored Water Heating, ChargeWise, and the Commercial, Industrial and Agricultural Interruptible Program. By signing up for these programs, our members opt-in to let us control electrical demand over peak use (or high cost) time periods. Through these programs, we experience energy savings that we share with the members on the programs.

GREAT RIVER ENERGY STRATEGIC PLANNING

As one of 28 member-owners, we are also very involved in the governance of our wholesale power supplier GRE. Stearns Electric Association Board of Director Greg Blaine serves on the GRE Board of Directors where he participates in discussions and decisions to keep Stearns Electric's wholesale power costs competitive. A recent example is GRE's decision to:

- Retire Coal Creek Station in 2022
- Add significant wind energy purchases
- Convert Spiritwood Station's fuel source from coal to natural gas
- Install a 1-MW long-duration battery

These improvements will provide lasting sustainability and cost containment benefits to Stearns Electric Association for years to come. These changes will also position GRE to be more than 95% carbon-free by 2023.

EQUITY MANAGEMENT

Another important area to plan for at Stearns Electric is our debt and cost of debt. Our business is very capital and cash-intensive. We have over \$142 million in assets. The majority of those assets are electrical distribution infrastructure-equipment: poles and wires. Managing the debt we carry for building and maintaining this infrastructure is a critical function of the Cooperative. Stearns Electric has aggressively restructured our debt to take advantage of historically low-interest rates. By doing this, Stearns Electric is planning to save millions of dollars in future interest expenses. This benefits overall business and our member-consumers.

These are just some of the ways that Stearns Electric plans for and executes prudent business practices. Know that we continue to act in the best interests of you, our Stearns Electric members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Robin Doege". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

MEMBER NOTICE

STORED WATER HEATING CONTROL PERIOD TO CHANGE FOR WINTER

Reminder to members enrolled on the Stored Water Heating Program: the electric thermal storage schedules for water heating and space heating will be controlled from 6:00 a.m. through 10:00 p.m. beginning October 1, 2020 through April 30, 2021.

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).			

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on August 27, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. at the Stearns Electric St. Joseph office.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed the July 2020 financial and statistical information with the Board.

Minnesota cooperatives, including Stearns Electric, had a call with Minnesota Congressman Collin Peterson regarding an issue with refinancing RUS debt and significant penalties associated with refinancing. These penalties make it prohibitive for electric cooperatives to take advantage of historically low interest rates. Congress is being asked to waive the penalties for refinancing RUS debt, which would save hundreds of millions of dollars in interest expenses for Minnesota co-ops alone.

The new Member Engagement Group applicants were shared. The directors reviewed and approved the list of existing and new participants.

The Business Development report included an overview of the electric bus program followed by a discussion about how the power industry will look in the future after shutting down coal plants.

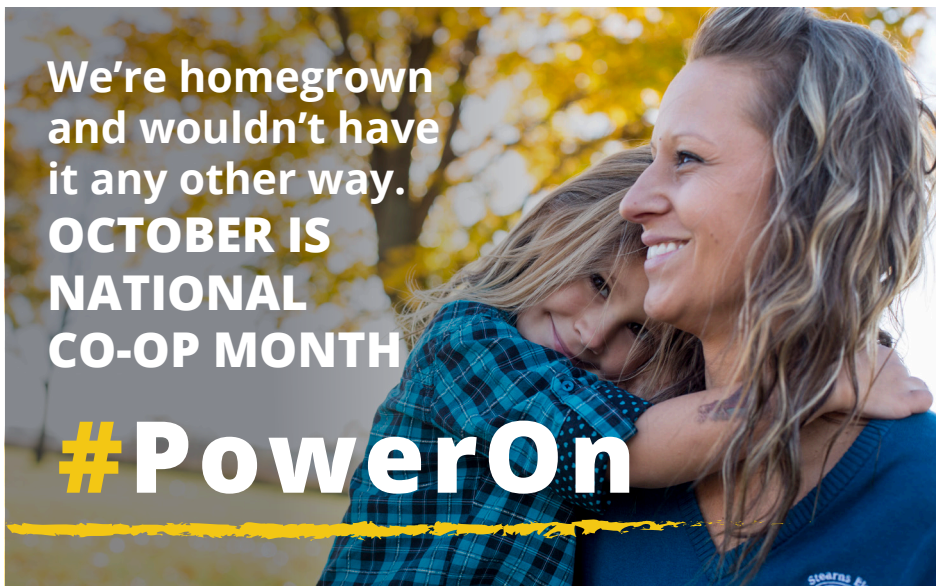
VP of Engineering and Operations Matt O'Shea reported that new services are right in line with the past couple years at about 300 for the year. Also, our aggressive 2020 construction plan appears to be on track.

Great River Energy provided initial findings after controlling for the potential Northern States Power zonal peak. GRE is continuing to provide insight and data analysis as we discuss load control response and analyze the value associated with our programs. This will help Stearns Electric make better educated decisions as we plan for our system-wide receiver change-out over the next 5 years.

The upcoming Board peer evaluation will be held virtually with a facilitator. This evaluation will give directors feedback on their performance as a director and the process will conclude prior to the 2021 strategic planning session.

Directors Jerry Fries and Tony Ampe were congratulated for their recent board training accomplishments.

Next Board Meeting:
November 24, 2020



CONCERNS ABOUT STRAY VOLTAGE? LET US KNOW

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric Association, you should feel free to call us anytime with concerns related to your electrical service. One area that can be a concern, particularly for livestock farmers, is stray voltage.

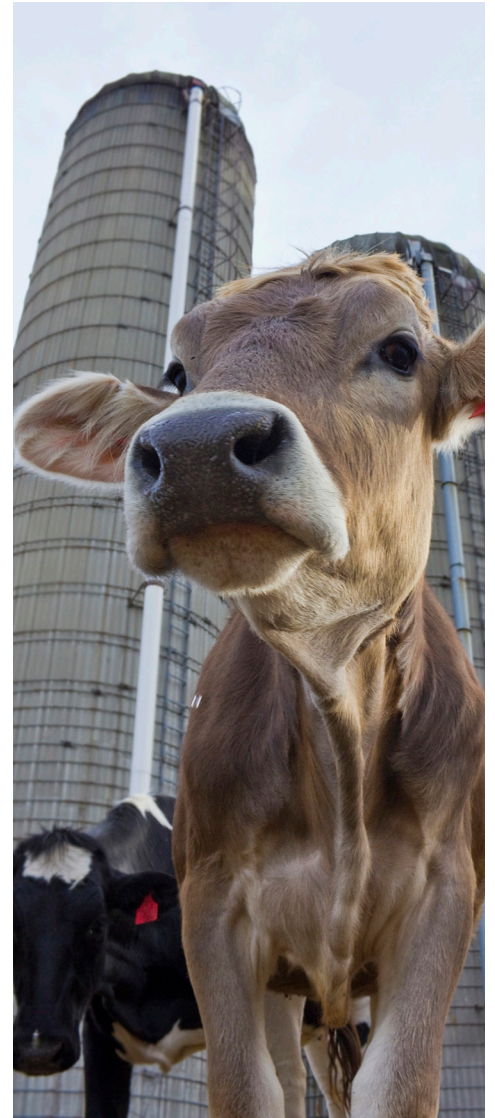
Your Cooperative's electrical distribution system must be grounded to earth to ensure continuous safety and reliability, as required in applicable electrical codes. The presence of some level of stray voltage is a normal, inherent and unavoidable result of electricity traveling through a grounded utilities' distribution system. A livestock farmer may, however, become concerned their animals are experiencing a level of stray voltage exceeding acceptable levels and possibly impacting animal behavior.

The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is based on extensive research

on the subject. It outlines the steps farmers, licensed electrical contractors and utilities can take to discover and resolve stray voltage concerns on livestock farms. The Guide includes a list of common causes and a farm wiring checklist to assist farmers and electrical contractors in visually inspecting farm electrical systems and noting potential stray voltage sources. Additionally, the Guide goes through what the farmer and utility should expect when a stray voltage investigation is conducted, including the proper testing procedures.

We have long worked with our members to address this issue. The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is a great tool and standard approach to analyzing and responding to stray voltage concerns. The Guide can be downloaded for free by visiting <https://www.stearnselectric.org/account-services/service-requests/stray-voltage/>.

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours to discuss concerns you may have and, if interested, schedule a stray voltage investigation.



MINNESOTA LAW OFFERS SHUT OFF PROTECTION FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

When a household member has been ordered into active duty, for deployment or for a change of duty station, some member-consumers may find it hard to pay their utility bills. Minnesota law protects these military personnel from shut-off if they cannot pay their utility bills in full.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Your household income is below the state median and you pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- You receive energy assistance and pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- Your household income is above the state median household income, and you make and keep a payment plan.

HOW TO APPLY

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 for an application, and to make a payment plan.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

If you and Stearns Electric cannot agree on a payment plan, you have the right to appeal to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Stearns Electric will not disconnect your service during the appeal process.

CONVENIENT BILLING OPTIONS



SIGN UP FOR AUTOPAY BY NOVEMBER 30TH FOR A CHANCE TO WIN!

AutoPay takes the worry out of paying your bills. Simplify your finances and enroll your account in AutoPay today. Your bill will be paid automatically each month on the due date.

AutoPay is safe, secure, easy and convenient. After the initial set-up, you won't have to spend any time paying your Stearns Electric Association bill each month. You'll have peace of mind knowing you will never have to pay a late fee or worry about a misplaced bill. AutoPay is free and saves you the cost of stamps and checks, not to mention the effort of mailing your payments. If you like to keep a paper trail, no problem. With AutoPay, you can still receive bills online or in the mail.

You can have your bill payment automatically electronically transferred from your designated checking account or savings account, debit card* or major credit card* FREE of charge. (*VISA, MasterCard, American Express or Discover).

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

Stearns Electric is giving away three \$100 bill credits to members signed up with AutoPay. To be entered into the bill credit drawing, you must be currently enrolled in AutoPay or sign up by November 30th using a designated checking or savings account.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR THE AUTOMATIC PAYMENT PLAN?

ONLINE: The easiest way to get started is to enroll online through SmartHub. Visit www.stearnslectric.org to sign up for, or log into, SmartHub.

BY MAIL: If you prefer not to use SmartHub, you can enroll by mail by completing the form available on your recent bill insert or by printing the form online.

- Fill out your financial institution's name, address and phone number on the lines provided.
- If your payment is to be deducted from a checking account, enclose a blank check. Write VOID across it. DO NOT SIGN IT. If your payment is to be deducted from a savings account, enclose a deposit slip that has your account number on it.
- Sign, date and return the form to the Cooperative.

BY PHONE: Simply call SecurePay at (855) 386-9908 and follow the instructions to enroll in recurring payments.

Please continue to pay your bill in your usual way until your bill indicates that the balance will be automatically paid.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

LOOK FOR THE ENERGY STAR® LABEL!

The average household owns 24 electronic products, which account for roughly 12% of home energy use. When shopping for electronics, consider purchasing ENERGY STAR®-certified products, which can be 70% more efficient than conventional models.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

TEST YOUR SMOKE ALARMS

Because you'll be using more of your electrical devices and appliances as the weather gets colder, make sure that all of your smoke alarms are in working order. This ensures that if an electrical fire breaks out, you and your family will be properly warned before the fire grows out of control.



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ENERGY IS INNOVATION CONTINUED

It pulls the necessary ingredients from each feed bin, mixes them together, and sends the feed to the cattle via conveyor belts."

In all, there are eight different cattle pens, each with its own feed station. Brandon has full control from his smartphone to monitor the automatic feeding system, which has the capacity to feed all of the cattle for three full days.

Essentially, it'll free up some of Brandon's time to focus on other farm tasks or spend a few days away from the farm knowing the cattle are still being fed and watered.

Along with the automatic feeding system, the new barn has a manure pit which is a win-win for the cattle and the Dingmanns.

"We save a considerable amount of time and work with the slatted floor and manure pit below the new steer barn. Instead of cleaning out each cattle pen, hauling manure away and finding a place to store or pile the manure every month, we now have 12 months of storage and we haul it away one time per year," he continued.



COOPERATIVE COMMITMENT TO EFFICIENCY

Stearns Electric Association is committed to providing reliable electric service and innovative energy solutions for our members. In order to help our commercial, industrial and agricultural (CI & A) members save money and use energy more wisely, we provide an extensive rebate program in partnership with our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy.

"Our rebates and grants assist our members with the initial cost of energy-efficient installations," John Pantzke, Stearns Electric's Business Development Representative, said. "When we connect with our members as they plan or complete their project, it's our goal to ensure that operational changes and new equipment are as energy-efficient as possible. We are also able to help determine energy and cost savings by calculating the anticipated return on investment before the project gets underway."

For this project, despite the need to use more kilowatt-hours of electricity over time, energy will be used more efficiently, which helps

simplify daily operations on the farm.

"In the energy industry, this is known as beneficial electrification. Energy-efficient products, like this automatic feeding technology, make using electricity in new ways a smart choice. Even though there might be more energy use overall, energy is being used more efficiently, which helps promote renewable energy resources and helps electric utilities cut down on using fossil fuels like propane, natural gas and gasoline. Mutually beneficial for both the electric cooperative and the electric consumer," Pantzke said.

TAKING RISKS

"I've always enjoyed trying new things and taking risks," Brandon explained. "We've been innovative with our work in the field and with our equipment in the past. Now was a great time to be innovative with this new barn."

Brandon encourages other farmers who might be considering implementing new technologies in their farming operations to step out of their comfort zone and try it. "Don't be afraid of risk. Don't be

afraid to make the initial decision to implement something new. Whether it's right or wrong, you won't know until you try."

New technology has given Brandon peace of mind at any time of the day. "These days, if I feel I need to check on something for the farm, I can just pull out my phone and ensure the technology is working as it should. I no longer have to leave the dinner table or rush home after an event just to check on things," he said.

And these additions to the farm set the Dingmann family up for future success. "Jennifer and I knew we wanted to get an early start in purchasing the family farm. We are looking forward to expanding operations ourselves before we pass it on to the next generation," he continued.

"One thing I will miss by having this new technology is driving the feed tractor in the morning. Some



mornings, there is nothing better than enjoying my cup of coffee while watching the cattle come running over to eat. But the new system is better for the cattle, and it's easier for me," he concluded. "I am thankful to my dad for giving us the opportunity to purchase the farm, and supporting and trusting the decision to build this new steer barn."

OFFICES CLOSED

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Thursday, November 26 and Friday, November 27 in observance of Thanksgiving. If you experience an outage during the holiday, please call us at (800) 962-0655 or log into SmartHub to report your outage. Crews are on call 24/7, ready to respond to any emergency.

OFFICES OPEN BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

The Stearns Electric offices remain closed to walk-in traffic but are open for appointments. Members and guests should call Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 to make an appointment during regular office hours, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

COOKING CORNER

PUMPKIN SLOPPY JOES

Submitted by: Rochelle Shann



Ingredients:

1 lb ground beef
¼ C onion, finely chopped
½ C ketchup
4 Tbsp tomato juice
½ tsp chili powder
dash ground cloves
dash nutmeg
dash pepper
½ C pumpkin, canned
hamburger buns

Directions:

In a large skillet, cook beef and onion over medium heat until meat is no longer pink. Drain. Add ketchup, tomato juice, chili powder, cloves, nutmeg and pepper. Bring to a boil. Stir in pumpkin. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes or until heated through. Serve on buns. Enjoy!

CONTEST DETAILS:

One member per account may submit one recipe per month. Recipes will be saved for future publications. The recipe selected each month will receive a \$10 credit on their electric bill. Submit recipes to communications@stearnslectric.org or mail to: Stearns Electric, Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374.



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

900 Kraft Drive SE, PO Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352

(800) 962-0655

www.stearnselectric.org

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Fuller Creative

WORK
HERE
LIVE
HERE
SERVE
HERE



***Our employees don't just work here.
They call our community home.***

Stearns Electric Member Service Representative Judy Terres-Madsen makes our community a better place as a health and wellness coach. She leads workshops and supports individuals in their personal health journeys. With the combination of her own healthy habits and passion for helping others, Judy helps people improve their overall health, working with them through the challenges and celebrations to leave a positive impact. In addition to her coaching, Judy leads the Wellness Program at Stearns Electric, inspiring a healthy work culture.