Farm-to-Tap series:

Hop yard farmers

Home-grown hops help meet demand for local brew houses

Get a jumpstart on winter by caulking now

WHAT’S NEW WITH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The mystery under those big green boxes

Pictured is Sarah Mann, owner of Sweet 16 Farm.
CEO MESSAGE  Brian Krambeer, president/CEO  |  800.432.2285  |  bkrambeer@MiEnergy.coop

CEO MESSAGE

They also personally live and are affected by the decisions they direct. You elect to govern the cooperative are entrusted to members. Because of this member-ownership structure, the Minnesota, MiEnergy Cooperative is owned locally by its directors in each district for member representation. 

Following the creation of MiEnergy in 2017 all 14 directors, seven from then Tri-County and seven from Hawkeye REC, comprised the new MiEnergy Cooperative Board of Directors. The new bylaws allowed for a smaller board as many as 14 directors, but as few as nine directors. The directors looked at a natural succession plan to reduce the size of the board.

At the 2019 annual meeting you may recall that Director Roger Hegland announced his resignation and will be stepping down at the end of this month following 36 years of service on the board.

At our August 28 board meeting, Director Darla Rance announced she will be moving out of the co-op’s service territory and submitted her resignation following nine years of service. The board regrettably accepted her resignation. Our bylaws require residency in the cooperative service territory. The board looked around Roger and Darla’s resignations as a natural succession and balances between shareholders and ratepayers. Without this oversight, it could be in the IOUs interest to charge as high as possible to return profits to their shareholders.

Because the board members, who are setting rates for MiEnergy are also members and users of co-op-generated electricity, there is no benefit in charging any more than necessary for power. As mentioned last month, MiEnergy undertakes extensive cost-of-service studies to ensure rates are appropriate and adequate to solely cover the costs of providing service. Our shareholders are our members — that is the cooperative model.

We don’t take for granted what it means to be different from other electric providers. We appreciate and embrace our differences because it means we can serve you, our member, in a manner that best meets your needs. While there are dozens of positive ways electric cooperatives differ from other utilities, one of the core principles has been guiding us as we make long-term decisions to ensure reliable, safe, affordable energy for our members. We’re proud of our track record of powering our communities.

I personally believe that we have the best utility regulatory model. I want to thank Roger Hegland and Darla Rance for their outstanding service to MiEnergy Cooperative and all of their contributions over the years that contributed to our success.

Please have a safe fall season and as always, I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.

MiCo-op Chats & board updates

This month we initiated new member-driven casual conversations we call MiCo-op Chats across our service territory. The goal is to inform members about our upcoming board elections in 2020, volunteer opportunities such as the director nominating committee and Operation Round Up board, and review the director application process that will be communicated in future issues of MiNews. We also want to talk about whether our cooperative members want to talk about, such as solar generation, electric rates, electric vehicles, broadband, etc.

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Board room highlights | August 28, 2019

• Minnesota Youth Tour Delegate Sophie Piper reported on her co-sponsored trip to Washington, D.C.
• Approved a revolving loan fund application for the City of Houston.
• Approved Resolution 19-07 authoring a loan application request for Five Star Cooperative.
• Approved amendment #18 to the construction work plan.
• Received updates on MISO and MiBroadband.
• Approved Resolution 19-08 Support and Commitment for MiBroadband’s grant application.
• Discussed and regrettably accepted the resignation of Director Darla Rance due to relocation of residence.
• Set the 2020 Annual Meeting date for April 22, 2020, to be held at the Mabel Community Center.

The next board meeting is scheduled for 8 a.m. on September 27 at the Rushford office.

What’s new with electric vehicles?

MiEnergy has a Plug-In Electric Vehicle (PEV) program. It is based on a time-of-use rate, which is designed for maximum flexibility and a way for you and the co-op to save money on the energy bill. If you can charge your PEV during off-peak times (weekends, holidays and weekdays 9 a.m. to 9 a.m.), there is potential to save monthly.

The co-op also has a $200 rebate available for an EV charging station.
One-time Contribution:

Mail to: MiEnergy Cooperative, PO Box 90, Cresco, IA 52136

Account Number: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________

**I understand the amount above will be automatically added to my monthly electric bill.**

Make check out to RECare, c/o MiEnergy Cooperative.

Thank you for your contribution.

MiEnergy Cooperative appreciates your generosity and the pledges in helping others. MiEnergy Cooperative members, your assistance can go a long way when combined with those of other generous single donations of any amount of your choice, monthly contributions.

**MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS**

RECare is a consumer contribution fund in which members like you assist other members who need help in paying utility bills. Consider a one-time contribution or enroll to provide monthly contributions. You can also go to www.MiEnergy.coop to fill out a donation form.

**IOWA MEMBERS:** To apply for RECare funds, please contact Northeast Iowa Community Action offices in Chickasaw, Howard and Winneshiek counties.

**MINNESOTA MEMBERS:** To apply for RECare funds, please contact MiEnergy at 1-800-432-2285.
Sweet 16 Farm embodies sustainability & community

In the Midwest we are accustomed to seeing corn, beans and alfalfa as our core crops, especially in the driftless country. But what if there is another specialty crop that could be classified and recognized in this collection as well? Indeed hop yards and hop farmers are making their "re-appear." Once a flourishing crop before prohibition, what fun it is to re-visit this unique agricultural product. Hops were initially introduced to the United States in the 1600s. The first commercial hop yard officially opened in New York state in the 1800s, and the crop made its way into the Midwest before being destroyed by a downy mildew in the mid-1920s. Fast forward to the recent craft beer era, and we now find hop farms becoming more popular in our region, providing local breweries with the freshest hops for their brews!

We are fortunate to have in our area a small hop yard owned by Sarah Mann located in the Root River Valley of Southeastern Minnesota. Sarah, from Sweet 16 Farm near Houston, has been growing specialty hops for about five years, which allows her to focus on her passion for the harvest every year since it’s a time to showcase where their food and drink comes from locally. Each year, Sweet 16 Farm partners with different local breweries, transporting their bountiful harvest within the first 24-hours after picking. Undeniably fresh and local! This small-scale, one-acre hop yard has two varieties: Cascade and Newport. The Cascade Hops, a classic American variety, provides a flavorful citrus palate to the specialties, that brewers love. Hops provide their “hoppy” aroma. Sarah’s dedication to sustainable farming practices is evident in her hop yard. “Our farming methods are 100% sustainable. We do not use sprays, fertilizers or pest deterrents that threaten the natural balance of our local ecosystem. We build our yard using cedar posts harvested from our woods, free-range chickens help with fertilizing and pest control, and we utilize cover cropping in the alleys to minimize weeds and revitalize the soil,” elaborates Sarah.

AGRI-TOURISM AND THE HOP HARVEST MUSIC FEST

Late August marks the ripening peak for the bright green elongated cones that have matured on the 24-foot tall hop bines. It is known as a wet hop beer. A fresh hop beer utilizes whole cone hops that have been hand-stamped with their logo. This soil to boil difference is often likened to using fresh herbs in cooking versus dried herbs.

"It’s such a rewarding process when people come to the Hop Harvest Music Fest and then approximately one month later, they can try the fresh hop beer locally!” says Sarah. She looks forward to the harvest every year since it’s a time to showcase where their food and drink comes from locally. This year’s Hop Harvest Music Fest had over 250 people in attendance. A family-friendly farm day complete with farm animals, food trucks, kids activities, and camping. Next year’s event will take place on Saturday, August 22, 2020.

Growing a specialty crop is both difficult and rewarding. Sarah took a six-month course through the Land Stewardship’s project Beginning Farmers Program to understand the hops product, the pests, the climate and weather deterrents and the diseases that could impact her hop yard. Did you know that it takes three years for hop plants to reach maturity? That’s some serious dedication to one crop! Thank you Sweet 16 Farm for enhancing your farm and gardening skills to include growing hops which can now delight our taste buds with local, fresh-hop brews!

DRIFTLESS GROWN FARM INITIATIVE

Cheese, flowers, grapes, hops, coffee, CSAs, pasture raised pork, grass-fed lamb and beef, goats for grazing, apples, chefs, educators, forestry specialists, artists and more! This new initiative called Driftless Grown was introduced to the community at this year’s Hop Harvest Music Fest on a late August weekend. Farmers and sustainable organizations from around the Driftless Region came together to showcase what they do best. There were family-friendly activities such as planting pumpkins and bacon tasting! MiEnergy is a proud sponsor to help financially support this regional farm effort. The new Houston County Farm Initiative helps farmers build skills as entrepreneurs and connect with resources to help strengthen their business operations. The project aims to support existing and budding farmers by connecting them with education, networks, resources, and new markets, as well as attract new entrepreneurs to the region through strategic branding and promotion. Find out more information at www.driftlessgrown.com or follow them on social media.

FRESH FLOWERS TO ADORN YOUR TABLE

During the past two years, we have featured in this newsletter many local places and farms that have given you a multitude of ideas on how to incorporate and bring local foods and drink choices to your table. So why not decorate that same table with local fresh cut flowers from a local farm? Look no further than Sweet 16 Farm. Sarah meticulously grows over 30 varieties of flowers and artfully arranges the bouquets. Sweet 16 Farms flowers are available for purchase as custom orders for events or weddings, and also through a CSA subscription bouquet.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)

CSA is a partnership between farm and community. Sharing the rewards as well as the risks of the season’s bounty. Your purchase of a CSA bouquet subscription helps support your farmer in the current growing season, and also to invest in the next. Each week, late June through early September, Sweet 16 Farm will create gorgeous arrangements for you, full of seasonal bounty to wow your senses.

All blooms are sustainably grown from seed to flower at Sweet 16 Farm. On average, each bouquet will contain 15-25 stems artfully arranged in crafty grower's choiceCSAlogo. They have convenient pick up locations and busin...
Caulking can save money
WHERE DO I START?

Simply speaking, the materials of a house that separate the outside from the inside are considered the home’s envelope. It is the barrier that keeps us from experiencing the extremes of the outside environment and keeps the inside of our home comfortable, dry, and energy efficient.

The home’s envelope includes windows, doors, walls, ceilings, and foundations. Each of these components consist of several elements that go together to create the structure. So, for instance, a wall section may consist of the interior paint, the drywall, the framing lumber, the air barrier and vapor sealing, the insulation, the exterior sheathing, the siding, and the exterior paint. Well-designed components work together to make the envelope as tight as possible.

HOME TIGHTENING

Every home needs a certain amount of fresh air for the furnace and appliances that burn fuel, for getting rid of excess moisture, and for reducing odors and stuffiness. When this air exchange is controlled, it’s called ventilation. When it seeps uncontrollably through cracks and holes in the envelope of our home, it is called air infiltration. Air that leaks through the ceiling, walls, foundation, and other areas are significant sources of heating and cooling losses in a home—up to one third in some houses. Stopping air infiltration, you can adjust your thermostat accordingly (up in warm weather, and down in cold weather) to save money through greater efficiency.

According to EnergySavers.gov, a one-degree adjustment for an eight-hour period can save up to one percent on your power bill for that period of time. When family members are away from the house, either at work or school, and when everyone is in bed at night are great times for energy savings.

For more information on ways to make your home more energy efficient, visit EnergyEdCouncil.org.

SEAL HOLES, CRACKS, LEAKS

Anything that penetrates your walls or ceilings is a potential location for an air leak. Gaps around windows, doors, fireplaces, electrical boxes—even cracks in plaster—can allow air to move between the inside and outside of your house. Seal them up with caulk, weather-stripping, or plaster. And foam gaskets on outlets and switches can increase comfort, avoiding unnecessary energy use.

SEAL THE OUTSIDE

There are many places to apply caulking or foam to weather seal the exterior of your home:
- doors and windows;
- vents for furnaces, dryers, water heaters, air exchangers;
- entry points for wires, pipes, cables, faucets.

CONSIDER EQUIPMENT AND CARGO EXTENSIONS OF YOUR VEHICLE

Lumber, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipe and even bulk materials can conduct electricity, so keep them out of contact with electrical equipment.


Contractors working

Cooperative crews handle all the day-to-day operations, but on an annual basis MiEnergy hires many different contractors that make sure our electric system is safe and reliable for our members. Through the cooperative’s bidding process, the following contractors will be working in our area this fall and winter: Acculine, Asplundh, Chapman Metering, Highline Construction, iClimb, Lake States, MiTech, New Age and Tjader & Highstrom Utility, LLC.

Please be aware that you may see these companies working throughout our service territory in Minnesota and Iowa. If you ever have a question or concern about a person who says they are doing work on behalf of the co-op, please call us at 800-432-2285 at any time (day or night) to confirm.
Underground power and the big green box

Electricity might flow into your neighborhood over your head, or under your feet. It’s easy to spot wires on top of those wooden poles and figure out how electricity gets delivered by overhead lines. But there’s also a way to deduce that you’ve got underground lines—look for green metal boxes about the size of a mini-fridge sitting in people’s front yards.

They’re called pad-mounted transformers and they do the same thing as those gray cans up on top of the poles—step higher-voltage electricity down so it’s more useful and safer for your home. The major difference is a pad-mounted transformer connects to underground power lines.

No one’s exactly sure what share of power lines in the U.S. are underground, but one industry study estimated 18 percent. To a lot of people, underground lines look better. But they’re more expensive to install. A lot more. As much as five or 10 times the cost, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. And while falling trees and cars crashing into poles can knock out above-ground power lines, underground problems can be more difficult to pinpoint and correct.

The big green boxes that connect power lines look surprisingly simple inside—wires come in and go out through the transformer. Now that you know what they are, you don’t have to go looking inside, and you shouldn’t. Those locked boxes are routing a lot of electricity, so only expert lineworkers should be near the equipment.

Never use pad-mounted transformers as benches while waiting for the school bus, and kids should never play on or near them. Don’t plant landscaping around pad-mounted transformers because our crews may need to get to them, and roots can interfere with the underground wires. Never dig near a pad-mounted transformer—remember to dial 8-1-1 for any outdoor projects that require digging.

Remember, whether you’re around underground or overhead utility equipment, the same safety rules apply—stay away from power lines.

Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 49 percent of the nation’s landscapes.

**This institution is an equal opportunity employer.**
Thank You!

MiEnergy would like to thank members who voluntarily participated in the Summer Shift campaign during June, July & August. The Summer Shift incorporated simple modifications and new habits such as delaying the dishwasher, turning up the thermostat and shifting the start of laundry that will help change tomorrow’s lifestyles for the next generation. Thanks for helping to keep electric rates affordable for everyone.