



Cover Photo: Becky Stattelman, December Calendar Photo Contest Winner

Agralite Electric Cooperative NEWSLETTER

December 2020

Manager's Article by Kory Johnson

2020 is coming to a close! This truly has been a year unlike any other and a year many of us would like to put behind us; beginning with reports, shortly after the first of the year, of a highly contagious disease coming out of China called COVID-19. By March, our country and the world were experiencing a pandemic unlike anything in modern history. Borders, schools, and businesses were ordered to close. We found ourselves scrambling for cleaning supplies, PPE equipment, and some food products. We learned new terms including social distancing, work from home, mask up, and distance learning. Through the summer months, we have adapted to these new normals. Unfortunately, rural Minnesota has seen an increase in the number of cases as we enter the fall season. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge for each of us, but even through these difficult circumstances, Agralite continues to deliver safe, reliable electricity to serve the needs of our member owners. At times, the cooperative has had to limit access to our offices and have employees work remotely. We also had to postpone our annual meeting. I want to thank our members for their understanding and cooperation during this time.

The 2020 elections have come and gone, but as I write this column, the final results are not in and several races still are to be determined, including who will be the next President of the United States! The final makeup of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate are still up in the air. One result in our area that is known is the victory of Michelle Fischbach over long time representative Collin Peterson. I would like to express my appreciation to Congressman Peterson for his many years of service to rural Minnesota. His leadership in Washington, D.C., and his efforts to benefit rural Minnesota, and especially his help in matters important to electric cooperatives have been greatly appreciated. I would like to congratulate Congresswoman Elect Fischbach on her election and look forward to meeting with her and discussing matters related to rural electrics. Also, I would like to congratulate Senator Smith on her re-election. Senator Smith has been a champion for rural electrics and has co-authored several key bills relating to electric cooperatives.

I hope as the dust settles over the election and the final results are announced our elected leadership, whomever are the victors, can come together and unite our country. We do have the privilege of living in the greatest country in the world!

I am very pleased to report that Agralite is having a very strong yearly financially. Margins from electrical sales through the third quarter are \$1,482,346. 352200 Energy sales have been good for the first three quarters of the year. The cooperative is showing a slight increase in sales over the previous year even as the cooperative saw a slow down in some of the commercial accounts during the pandemic.

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Agralite Electric Co-op *We're member-owned!*

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www.agralite.coop



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CLOSED:
Dec. 24, 25, & Jan. 1



Touchstone Energy®

Agralite is a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative.

Manager's Article *Continued*

At the October board meeting, the preliminary 2021 Work Plan and Budget was presented to the board. For 2021, Agralite will look to upgrade and replace a number of miles of older distribution lines. Also, the cooperative will be rebuilding approximately 13 miles of line in conjunction with the state of Minnesota Highway 12 project. This coming year, Agralite will be doing a new cost of service study. The purpose of the study is not necessarily to increase rates, but rather to ensure our rates are fair and equitable to all rate classes. Another purpose of the cost of service study will be to explore different rate options for our members. Agralite will also be researching and studying our headquarter facility to determine if an addition is needed to accommodate today's modern equipment. The good news is that, with the planned projects for the coming year, the margins remain strong for the cooperative, and there are no rate increases projected at this time! The board of directors will come back in November to take final action on the recommended 2021 Work Plan and Budget.

**Pick up your calendar
featuring member photos at
the Agralite office!**

Winter Office Hours:
8:00am – 4:30pm

Energy Saving Tip:



Energy bills can increase during winter for a variety of reasons, like houseguests, more time spent at home, and shorter days and longer nights. Small actions, like turning down your thermostat, replacing old bulbs with LEDs, and washing clothes in cold water can help you save.

Source: energy.gov



Find your account number and win a **\$100 credit!**

If your account number (as it appears on your monthly electric bill) is one of the [four account numbers](#) hidden in this issue, give our office a call by the end of the month and you will receive a \$100 bill credit. If more than one member finds their account number in a single issue, \$100 will be split equally amongst them.

As 2020 comes to an end, even with the challenges that the year brought, we busy ourselves with year-end business, last minute shopping, even though we will need to social distance, Christmas concerts and programs. I hope each of you have a chance to celebrate the season with friends and family. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Before the season passes us by, let's remember the greatest gift given, when a Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in Bethlehem. Let us make sure we have room in the inn for Him.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

2021 Basin Scholarship - Qualify? Please Apply!

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a wholesale power supplier to Agralite, is again offering this generous scholarship. Basin Electric's scholarship program began in 1990. Each year, Agralite solicits scholarship applications throughout our service area.

How Much Is The Scholarship? The Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) Scholarship Program will award more than 180 scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 each. The scholarships must be used for educational costs, and the student must enter college in the fall of the school year for which the scholarship is given. Checks will be made payable to the school, and will be distributed to the school by BEPC. Scholarships will be distributed in August.

Who Is Eligible To Receive The Scholarship? Dependent children (including adopted or step-children) of member-system consumers and dependent children of member-cooperative employees are eligible. The applicant must also be a U.S. citizen and enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school. Recipients are selected on the basis of academic record, potential to succeed, leadership, and participation in school and community activities, honors, work experience, a statement of education and career goals, and an outside appraisal.

How do I apply? Obtain forms and applications from your school counselor, the Agralite Electric Cooperative office, or www.agralite.coop.

The completed application and all other necessary information must be returned to Agralite Electric Cooperative **no later than February 19, 2021. 990100**



Four Ways Santa Saves Energy In His Workshop

The holiday season is finally upon us, and Santa and his elves have been especially busy as they gear up for their biggest night of the year.

It's no secret that Santa is known for running an efficient workshop-- how else could he make all those toys in time for Christmas Eve? Rumor has it that one way Santa ensures an efficient workspace is through energy-saving measures.

Here is how Santa saves energy in his workshop:



1 Santa leaves his decorations up year-round. By **using LED holiday light strands**, he's able to save on his monthly energy bills. LED holiday strands can last up to 40 seasons, which make them a great option for any festive home.



2 Santa requires several power tools to make a year's worth of new toys. That's why he insists on **using cordless power tools with the ENERGY STAR® rating**. According to energystar.gov, if all power tools in the U.S. used ENERGY STAR®-rated battery chargers, 2 billion kWh hours of electricity could be saved--that's equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1.7 million tons!



3 Mrs. Claus loves to keep warm by the fire in the evenings, and Santa knows one of the best tricks to ensure fireplace efficiency. While a fireplace can keep a small area of your home cozy and warm, it can also pull heated air from the room through the chimney. That's why Santa always **closes the fireplace flue when a fire isn't burning**.



4 Santa also saves energy by **using power strips**. Power strips are ideal for workshops, craft nooks, game rooms and other spaces in your home. With one simple switch, you can conveniently control several devices and electronics that are plugged into the power strip.

This holiday season, let's take a page from Santa's book and remember to save energy when possible. With these four tips, you'll be well on your way to savings (and hopefully, Santa's "nice" list!).



POWER YOUR HOME
OR BUSINESS ON

**100%
RENEWABLE
ENERGY**



Agralite offers RECs for purchase to offset your current usage with 100% renewable energy options. The electricity is still the same reliable, affordable energy you've always received from Agralite but, by participating in this program, your home or business will be supporting current and future renewable projects.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Renewable Energy Credit (REC)? 1 megawatt hour produced by a renewable energy source equals 1 REC. RECs are also called *Green Tags* and they represent the valuable renewable attributes of wind energy.

Do I need to purchase any special equipment? No special equipment is needed. Agralite Electric will fulfill all your electric needs while you enjoy the benefits of powering your business with renewable energy.

Where do RECs come from? Our RECs come from several wind farms in our region that supply renewable energy to our cooperative.

How much does it cost to power my home or business on 100% renewable energy? \$1 per MWh. Example: If you use 1,200 kWh per month, participating in the REC program would add \$1.20 + tax to your monthly bill.

SHOWCASE YOUR SUPPORT FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

1.800.950.8375

agralite@agralite.com

CURRENT AGRALITE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kathy Draeger, Clinton
District 1
Jeff Hufford, Morris
District 2 - Secretary/Treasurer
Bennett Zierke, Hancock
District 3
Steve Nelson, Starbuck
District 4
Orvin Gronseth, Murdock
District 5 - President
Andrea Thomson, Benson
District 6
Warren Rau, Appleton
District 7 - Vice President

MINUTES OF MEETING BOARD OF DIRECTORS October 2020

Board Chairman Orvin Gronseth called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Agralite Electric Cooperative to order at 8:30 a.m., October 29, 2020. Director Gronseth, Director Rau, Director Hufford, and Director Thomson were present. Director Draeger, Director Zierke, and Director Nelson joined via phone. The agenda, minutes of the last meeting, the monthly disbursements, and payment of capital credits of deceased members were approved.

Jonathan Messner, Manager of Member Services, reported on activities of his department for the month. He discussed load management for the month of September and the ALM project. He discussed DC fast charging and the Briggs generator program.

Jenny Stryhn, Manager of Finance, discussed Agralite's margins for the month of September. She discussed revenue deferral and a margin rebate and the Board approved Resolution to Amend Revenue Deferral Plan. She discussed the cold weather rule that went into effect October 15th. She showed graphs on the 2019 Key Ratio Trend Analysis Report. Jenny brought forth Work Order #500, Work Order #501, and Special Equipment WO September 2020 and the Board approved them.

The financials were given by Jenny with a PowerPoint presentation.

Tom Hoffman, Manager of Engineering & Operations, reported on activities

Utility Assistance Programs

Financial Assistance Is Available To Help With Utility Bills

As temperatures decline, the cost of heating starts to increase. During the cold weather months, some Agralite Electric Cooperative member-consumers might experience difficulty in paying their electric bills. We know that COVID-19 has created additional financial hardships, placing an even larger burden on families already struggling to pay their bills or bring their accounts current.

If you have a past-due balance with Agralite Electric Cooperative, or you are concerned about how to pay for heating costs this winter, there are some new resources available to help those in need.

COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program

A Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funded program, known as the COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program (CHAP), allocates \$100 million in Minnesota to cover housing expenses such as rent, mortgage, utilities or other housing-related expenses. Funds are available through Dec. 31, 2020, on a first-come, first-served basis. Eligible utility expenses include gas, electric, water and sewer. Propane is currently ineligible. Only past-due expenses incurred on or after March 1, 2020, and before Dec. 20, 2020, are eligible. *To learn more about the CHAP program or to apply for assistance:*

- Visit United Way 211, <http://211unitedway.org/>, to access the application and assistance or questions regarding eligibility, or call 800-543-7709.
- General FAQ's, including information on income limits and what is covered: <http://www.mnhousing.gov/sites/np/covid19housingassistanceprogramFAQ>

Energy Assistance Program

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which helps low-income renters and homeowners pay for home heating costs and furnace repairs. Household income must be at or below 50% of the state median income (\$54,357 for a family of four) to qualify for benefits. Applications must be received or postmarked by May 31, 2021. *To learn more about the EAP program or to apply for assistance:*

- Visit the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Assistance website, <https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/>, for more details and to access the application portal.
- Contact your county EAP service provider for additional information and assistance.

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule also helps to protect and reconnect residential heat from Oct. 15 through April 15.

Agralite Electric Cooperative exists because of you, and we are dedicated to the people and communities we serve. If you are having difficulty paying your electric bill and do not qualify for either of these programs, please contact us to set up a Cold Weather Rule payment plan.

of his department for the month. He discussed line crew projects and outages. He showed pictures of poles damaged by farm equipment. He stated that Paul Reiman announced his retirement and his last day will be October 30th.

Tom gave the safety report.

The 2021 Preliminary Budgets were discussed by the department heads.

Kory Johnson, General Manager, reviewed his report to the board. Kory and Jennifer discussed wholesale power costs and showed a table comparing rates for the three wholesale providers.

They discussed power contracts.

Marissa Chevalier, Executive Assistant, explained corrections to the June 2020 and August 2020 minutes and the Board approved them.

Kory Johnson will be the delegate for the Basin Electric Virtual Annual Meeting.

The November board meeting was set for the 25th.

An executive session was held.

Being no further business came before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.



Induction Cooking 101

Are you in the market for a new stove top? Have you considered an induction cooking range? Its most alluring feature is the shiny glass surface that wipes clean with a simple swipe of the sponge—but that isn't where the features end.

The cooking process is faster and the energy from heating goes directly to the food and not to the area around it, so less energy is wasted. Statistics show that 84% of the energy from an induction cooktop goes directly to heat the food, compared to 40% from a gas cooktop and 74% for an electric cooktop.

But, at the end of the day, safety goes a long way. Because the heat from the induction stays on the actual pot or pan, the stovetop stays cool, which lessens the chances of accidental burns from a hot burner. Induction cooking is also much less of a fire and health hazard when compared to gas cooktops.

A couple of additional items to consider is that only magnetic metals can work on induction cooktops, so you need to factor in the price of new pots and pans. Induction cooktops are more costly than gas and standard electric models, too, but energy efficiency will help offset some of the upfront costs.

Bottom line: There are pros and cons to using both gas and induction cooktops. When choosing between these two, weigh your priorities, financial capability, and safety concerns.

COLD WEATHER RULE

Minnesota residential cold weather law (MN Statute, Ch 235, sec.216B.097) provides that cooperative utilities cannot disconnect a residential consumer between October 15 and April 15, provided that certain conditions are met. These conditions include:

1. The disconnection would affect the customer's primary heat source; and
2. The customer has declared an inability to pay on forms provided by the coop; and
3. The household income of the customer is less than 50% of the state median income, as documented by the customer to the coop; and you have entered into a payment schedule and are reasonably current with your scheduled payments.

It is important to remember that a customer must meet all of the above conditions in order to be covered by the law.

There are several agencies that provide financial assistance to qualifying households. We urge you to check with them for details on available programs. Contact your local health and human services department, or one of the community action councils listed below:

Prairie 5 CAC 320-269-7976 West Central CAC 800-492-4805
Heartland CAC 320-235-0850

INDUCTION COOKING ADVANTAGES

✓ Less Energy Is Wasted

84% of the energy from electricity is used for induction cooking compared to 40% for gas cooktops.

✓ Cool Stovetop

Induction cooking only heats the cooking vessel, keeping the stovetop cool and reducing danger for kids.

✓ Maximum Safety

Induction cooking is much less of a fire hazard compared to gas cooktops.

FIGHT BACK AGAINST SCAMS

Scammers are targeting energy consumers everywhere. They often call threatening to shut off power unless payment is made immediately. Or they may call saying you overpaid and ask for credit card or bank information to provide a credit. Agralite Electric Cooperative would like to remind you to never give out personal information to anyone who calls claiming to be from Agralite.

Many of these scam attempts play out like this:

The caller poses as a representative of your power provider. They may say you are behind on your bill and a truck is on the way to disconnect your service unless you pay your bill right now – over the phone. Some ask their targets to purchase prepaid cards and call back with the prepaid card number to pay the bill.

Don't fall for these scams! Agralite Electric Cooperative wants to make sure you avoid any and all types of scams that could put you or your financial information in jeopardy.

If you have any questions or would like more information about how you can protect yourself from scammers, call us at 320-843-4150.



Call Day or Night
1.888.884.3887

Do not call the office for outages

November Energy Payment
is due December 20.*

*We accept Visa, Discover & Mastercard.

Stay Warm and Safe During Winter Storms and Power Outages

Shared from Star-Energy Services Newsletter of Alexandria

BEFORE A Winter Storm

- **Be informed.** Receive and follow alerts, warnings, and public safety information before, during, and after emergencies.

- **Create and review your family emergency plan.**

If you receive medical treatments or home health care services, work with your medical provider to determine how to maintain care and service if you are unable to leave your home for a period of time.

- **Assemble an emergency kit.** Add seasonal supplies, such as extra winter clothing and blankets.

- **Prepare for possible power outages.**

Fully-charge electronic devices before a storm if power outages are expected.

Consider buying a generator to supply power during an outage. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and learn how to use it safely before an outage.

- **Prepare your home for possible emergencies.**

Ensure your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working and have fresh batteries.

Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected every year.

Make sure your home is properly insulated and caulk and weather-strip around doors and windows.

Ensure you have sufficient heating fuel and consider safe backup heating options (fireplaces, woodstoves).

- Keep the gas tank at least half-full and have a winter emergency kit in the vehicle.

DURING A Winter Storm

- **Minimize outdoor activities.**

- **Drive only if it is absolutely necessary.**

- **Dress for the season to protect against the elements.** Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing instead of a single heavy layer. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Wear a hat, mittens (not gloves), and sturdy waterproof boots to protect your extremities. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

- **Watch for signs of frostbite** (*The freezing of the skin and body tissue*)

Symptoms — Loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, earlobes, face, and the tip of the nose.

Treatment — Get the person into a warm location. Cover exposed

skin, but do not rub the affected area. Seek medical attention immediately or call 911.

- **Watch for signs of hypothermia** (*Abnormally low body temperature (below 95°F) 1161800 that is life-threatening if not treated immediately*)

Symptoms — Shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, and slurred speech.

Treatment — Get the person to a warm location and seek medical attention immediately or call 911. Remove wet clothing. Warm the center of the body first by wrapping the person in blankets or putting on dry clothing - this is important, because warming hands and feet first can cause shock. Give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the person is conscious.

AFTER A Winter Storm

- Continue to monitor media for emergency information and follow instructions from public safety officials.

- Call 911 to report emergencies, including downed power lines and gas leaks.

- **Stay away from downed power lines.** Always assume a downed power line is live.

- Report power outages to your utility company.

- Stay off streets and roads until they are clear of snow.

- Use caution and take frequent breaks when shoveling snow to prevent overexertion. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter.

- Check your roof and clear accumulated snow to avoid roof collapses.

- Make sure your carbon monoxide detectors are working – carbon monoxide is a silent, odorless, killer.

- Clear exhaust vents from direct vent gas furnace systems to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Make sure emergency generators or secondary heating systems are well-ventilated because their fumes contain carbon monoxide.

- Clear snow from around vehicle exhaust pipes before starting to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Don't park close to corners so public safety vehicles and plows can maneuver safely.

- Be aware of children playing in the streets, particularly climbing on or running out from behind large snowdrifts. Parents should remind their children to be aware of plowing operations and traffic.

- Check on family, friends, and neighbors, especially the elderly, those who live alone, those with medical conditions, and those who may need additional assistance.