



Photo: Eric Hamm, April Calendar Photo Contest Winner

# Agralite Electric Cooperative NEWSLETTER

April 2024

## EMPOWERING

communities with  
innovative, sustainable  
energy solutions

## FOR OVER

# 80 YEARS

### Manager's Article *by Jenny Stryhn, General Manager*

I would like to thank everyone who attended our Power Hour events in Clinton and Swift Falls this past month. It was great to meet face to face with our membership and discuss important topics here at your local electric cooperative. One item of discussion at the meeting was the status of the evaluation process for our existing headquarters and the prospect of either renovating our existing buildings or constructing new headquarters. In 2021, Agralite completed a feasibility study comparing the options of remodeling our current facilities versus building offsite outside the city limits. We took the time to diligently review and evaluate all the options that were presented in the study. We decided at that time that neither option met the needs or goals of the cooperative. 1692300 There were significant challenges with both options as they were presented.

At the end of 2023, we reported that the cooperative finalized an updated feasibility study prepared by Engan Associates. This time, we evaluated the difference in costs associated with a remodel of our existing facility originally built in 1966, versus a new facility on our existing property. After close evaluation of not only the cost to renovate our existing buildings, but also the disruptions a major renovation would cause to our ongoing daily operations, the board decided that the longevity and efficiency of a new facility to be built on our current property would best serve Agralite Electric Cooperative long into the future.

Having decided on the best path forward, Agralite started the process of locating a qualified architectural firm to assist with design services for the new headquarters on our existing property. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was drafted and sent to multiple qualified architectural firms. The RFP process allowed us to evaluate the competing firms' relevant project experience with similar buildings, along with the costs associated with having the design completed.

After carefully reviewing the responses, we selected Mohagen Hansen to be the architect of record for our project. The team at Mohagen Hansen not only provided the best proposal to design a new headquarters facility that meets all of our needs well into the future, but also time and cost saving solutions that would minimize disruptions within our current operations during construction.


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

320 US-12, Benson, MN  
(320) 843-4150  
1-800-950-8375  
[www.agralite.coop](http://www.agralite.coop)

 Like us on Facebook



**Office Hours**  
8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.



Touchstone Energy®  
Agralite is a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative.

## 2024 ANNUAL MEETING



**SAVE THE DATE**  
JUNE 4, 2024







## 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.

### Congratulations to

Darlene Nichols for finding her account number in the February newsletter.

### Energy Saving Tip:

A well-designed landscape can add beauty to your home and reduce heating and cooling costs.



Plant deciduous trees with high, spreading crowns to the south of your home to block sunlight in the summer and reduce the need for air conditioning. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in winter, allowing sunlight to warm your home. Plant evergreen trees and shrubs with low crowns to block winter winds. Dense evergreen trees and shrubs are commonly planted to the north/northwest as windbreaks and can help lower energy used for home heating.



Call Day or Night  
1.888.884.3887

[Do not call the office for outages](#)

April Energy Payment is due May 20.\*  
\*We accept Visa, Discover & Mastercard.

## Manager's Article *Continued*

Agralite has outgrown the capacity of our current buildings. Outdated mechanical equipment and cramped facilities are impacting the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of service. In particular, the shop and mechanic areas need more space with updated equipment to accommodate the size and demands of today's service vehicles while providing safe and appropriate space for our employees.



Agralite in 1966



Agralite Today

The need for a new facility is driven by our mission of providing safe, reliable electrical power and other related services to improve the quality of life throughout our region. The cooperative is looking at a design that will allow us to operate effectively and efficiently, so we can best serve our members in every possible way. We also strive to ensure that we will build it using the most responsible and economical means possible.

While we are still in the beginning stages of the design process, it is important that we keep you, our member owners, informed throughout this process. We appreciate your support and your continued interest in your electric cooperative.



## Dig Smart. Dig Safe.

Before you dig, call 811 or visit [call811.com](http://call811.com) to mark underground utility lines. 811 is a free service that helps keep our community safe.



April Is National Safe Digging Month

## Director Nominations Now Open For Districts 1 & 2

Would you like to serve as a Director on the Agralite Electric Cooperative Board for your district? Agralite Electric Cooperative is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors elected by our membership. The cooperative's service territory is divided into seven districts with each district represented by a director who resides in that district. Directors elected serve a three-year term.

This year, we will have an election for directors for Districts 1 and 2.

**District 1 includes the townships of:** Almond, Upper Prior, Lower Prior, Malta, Otre, Big Stone, Upper Odessa, Lower Odessa, and Ortonville.

**District 2 includes the townships of:** Donnelly, Rendsville, Swan Lake, Pepperton, Morris, Framnas, Baker, Scott, Everglade, Eldorado, Graceville, and Moonshine.

Any member meeting the qualifications as specified in the Bylaws of Agralite Electric Cooperative may become a candidate for election to the Board by submitting a written petition for nomination with the signatures of no less than 15 members who are residents of the district for which the election is being held. All voting will be done by mail. Ballots will be mailed to all Agralite voting members on record in these districts before the Annual Meeting. 1682500 The election takes place at the Annual Meeting on June 4, 2024.

*Please call 320-843-4150 or stop by our office if you have questions on the nominating process or about becoming a director, and to pick up a petition for nomination.*

**Petitions are due to the office no later than 4:30 pm on Thursday, April 25th, 2024.**

**AGRALITE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
PETITION FOR NOMINATION**

To: Jeff Hufford, Board Secretary

I \_\_\_\_\_, would like to be a candidate to serve as a director for Agralite Electric Cooperative representing District No. \_\_\_\_\_. I hereby certify that I meet the requirements set forth in Article III, Section 2 of the Bylaws of the Cooperative and I request that my name be placed on the ballot that will be mailed to the members with the notice of the annual meeting of the Cooperative to be held on June 4, 2024. I respectfully file this petition with a minimum of fifteen (15) members of the Cooperative who are residents of District No. \_\_\_\_\_ and who support my candidacy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Candidate

We, the undersigned, certify that we are members of Agralite Electric Cooperative and that we reside in District No. \_\_\_\_\_. We are familiar with the requirement for serving as a director of the Cooperative and we believe that the above-named candidate meets the requirements to become and/or remain a director of Agralite Electric Cooperative representing District No. \_\_\_\_\_. By our signatures below we show our support for this Petition for Nomination. We further attest that, to the best of our knowledge and belief, the above-named candidate is a member of Agralite Electric Cooperative and is a resident of District No. \_\_\_\_\_.

Printed Name	Signature	Address	Phone #	Date
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

## TRAVELING SAFELY THROUGH WORK ZONES

Traveling safely, slowly, and attentively through work zones is critically important, particularly as a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) driver.

Narrow lanes, sudden stops, traffic pattern shifts, and uneven road surfaces present unique challenges in these areas for large trucks and buses. In fact, large trucks are overrepresented in fatal work zone crashes.

**Do your part to stay safe with tips from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Our Roads, Our Safety campaign:**

### RESEARCH YOUR ROUTE



Before setting out on the road, research your route. When possible, avoid work zones and use any detours that are available.

### PAY ATTENTION



Be aware of all signs throughout work zones that can indicate reduced speeds, lane changes, and other important information. Avoid distractions such as your cellphone, eating, drinking, the radio, GPS, and conversing with other passengers.



### SLOW DOWN

Lane closures, traffic pattern shifts, and reduced speeds are common in work zones. Make sure to slow down when entering a work zone and keep an eye out for road workers.

### MOVE INTO THE OPEN LANE



When approaching lane closures, move into the open lane as soon as possible. Be sure to pay close attention to vehicles around you that could be in your blind spot, and ensure you're not traveling in someone else's.



### KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Rear-end crashes are extremely common in work zones. Always maintain extra space between your vehicle and the one in front of you.

For more information on driving safely on the roads, visit [www.ShareTheRoadSafely.gov](http://www.ShareTheRoadSafely.gov) and for more on work zone safety, visit [www.workzonesafety.org](http://www.workzonesafety.org).



FMCSA-ADO-21-002





## Programs Offer Co-ops Grid Management Flexibility And Whole Power Savings

by Jonathan Messner, Manager of Member Services

More than 3,000 appliances, owned by Agralite members like you, play a role in managing the reliability of the regional electric grid and save the entire membership money at the same time.

Agralite offers voluntary programs that empower members to use the grid efficiently and economically by reducing demand during periods of high costs energy supplies and shifting energy consumption to off-peak times. 1475901 By choosing to enroll an electric appliance, such as a water heater, heat pump, or generator, into one of our “demand response” programs, you are helping keep electricity reliable and affordable.

***Agralite provides two ways for our members to make contributions toward helping manage the grid while receiving discounted rates or other incentives for their participation:***

1. Interruptible programs
2. Storage programs

Using the example of an electric water heater, a member who enrolls this home appliance into an interruptible program gives Agralite permission to pause service to the water heater to eliminate all or part of its load from the system for up to eight hours when wholesale energy market prices are high.

Through the flip of a switch, this strategy helps reduce our monthly billing peak. Water heaters enrolled in this program do have sufficient storage capacity to supply hot water over the peak period while service is paused so members aren't left with cold water. Members are also not caught off guard during times of interruption. Participants are often alerted in advance of a control event by Agralite.

This strategy is primarily employed to avoid high wholesale energy prices and reduce the monthly billing peak for our members.

***Article continues on page 5 in the column on the right***



*Pictured above: Agralite's 10 linemen, along with our construction engineer, meter tech, engineering assistant, cable locator, warehouseman, mechanic, and operations manager*

## Whatever It Takes: Powering Life, From A Lineworker's Perspective

Lineworkers are ranked as one of the 10 most dangerous jobs in the country. The lineworkers at Agralite Electric Cooperative work rain or shine, in often challenging conditions, to ensure you have reliable electricity. Help us by celebrating Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 8, 2024.

### The Danger

A lot of people know linework is dangerous because we work near high-voltage electricity. Move just the wrong way or lose focus for a split second, and it could be deadly. You have to be aware of your surroundings and the safety of the person next to you. We often work on energized power lines, and you can't always tell they are energized by just looking at them. You're working with an element of danger that requires concentration, and there is no margin for error. The environment compounds the pressure, because when you need power most is usually when the weather is worst. I'm often working in storms with rain, wind, extreme heat and cold, in the dark, or on the side of the road next to fast-moving traffic. Yes, it's dangerous, but that's what we're trained to do.

Many may not realize it, but we undergo years of training before we can officially be called a lineworker. We typically start as a groundperson, helping crews with tools and keeping job sites safe, then we transition to apprentice status, which typically spans four years. After an apprenticeship, with more than 7,000 hours of training under our belts, we transition to journeyman lineworker status—that's when we're considered officially trained in our field.

But the education is ongoing. Lineworkers continuously receive training to stay mindful of safety requirements and up to date on the latest equipment and procedures.

### The Physical Demand

The daily expectations of a lineworker are physically demanding, but you won't hear any of us complain about that. I know what I signed up for—loading heavy materials, climbing poles, and in and out of buckets. A lot of times, we go places the trucks can't, so I might be hiking through the woods loaded down with 40 pounds of personal protective equipment. But that's the job. Most of us are just glad to be outside.

### The Sacrifices

There are some sacrifices to being a lineworker. I'm often first on the scene of an emergency, seeing things that are devastating like car accidents, structure fires, and damage from severe storms. You don't know what type of situation you're going to face or when you're going to face it. We get calls at all hours and in the middle of the night. We make sure there is nothing standing in the way of helping our friends and neighbors get back to normal life. ***Article continues on page 5***

# Whatever It Takes: Powering Life, From A Lineworker's Perspective

Continued

## It's Worth It

One thing that makes this job worthwhile is the camaraderie. My co-op is my second family, and the line crews are a brotherhood. In this work, you have to depend on the person beside you in life-or-death circumstances. It's a culture of trust, teamwork, and service. It's all about keeping the teammate beside you safe and the lights on for everybody else.

I have a lot of pride in my work. Even when it's cold and wet, I know I'm working to keep people warm. There's a lot of satisfaction in hearing someone yell "thank you" from the window after the lights come back on or seeing people flipping the light switches on their porches after an outage is restored. No matter how tired I am or how long I've been working, that feeling always makes it worth it.

Agralite Electric Cooperative and its employees are members of this community. We live in the same neighborhoods. We shop at the same stores. Our kids go to the same schools. If your lights are off, there is a good chance ours are off too. So, you can trust that we are doing our best to get the lights back on as quickly and safely as possible—so you can get back to normal life.



## COLD WEATHER RULE & ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM NOTICE

*In accordance with Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule, electric service cannot be disconnected for nonpayment between October 1 and April 30 if electricity is the primary heat source and ALL of the following statements apply:*

- Your household income is at or below 50% of the state median household income. Income may be verified on forms provided by Agralite Electric Cooperative or by the local energy assistance provider.
- You enter into and make reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household.
- You receive referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation, or other programs likely to reduce your energy bills from Agralite Electric Cooperative.

### **Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule does not completely stop winter disconnects**

*Before disconnecting electric service to residential members between October 1 and April 30, Agralite Electric Cooperative must provide:*

- A 30-day notice of disconnection;
- A statement of members' rights and responsibilities;
- A list of local energy assistance providers;
- Forms on which to request Cold Weather Rule protection; and
- A statement explaining available payment plans and other options to continue service.

### **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 (\$58,793 for a family of four) to qualify for benefits. Applications must be received or postmarked by May 31, 2024.

*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.
- 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 our billing department to set up a payment plan.

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

## Programs Offer Co-ops Grid Management Flexibility And Whole Power Savings

Continued

Off-peak participants experienced approximately 60 pauses to their water heater service in 2023.

If you are more interested in the off-peak program, you would receive a rebate for a high-efficiency water heater that is "charged" overnight with sufficient storage capacity via less expensive electricity to supply your home's hot water needs. Program participants can expect their water heaters to recharge for eight hours, typically between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. during the winter season and 10 p.m. to 9 a.m. in summer. This strategy only applies to weekdays, excluding weekends and holidays unless billing peak control is needed.

Participation in this program helps provide significant economic relief to the overall membership by shifting heating load to the overnight hours, resulting in more favorable rates. This also helps us defer wholesale energy purchases to off-peak hours that would otherwise cost more to purchase during on-peak hours.



### ***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](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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).



## 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 - Vice President*

Andrea Thomson, Benson

*District 6*

Warren Rau, Appleton

*District 7 - President*

## MINUTES OF MEETING BOARD OF DIRECTORS February 2024

Board Chairman Warren Rau called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Agralite Electric Cooperative to order at 8:30 a.m., February 29, 2024. All members of the Board were present. The agenda, minutes of the last meeting, the monthly disbursements, the payment of capital credits of deceased members, Work Order #559, Work Order #560, Work Order #561, and Special Equipment January were approved.

The September board meeting date was discussed and a new date was set for September 27th.

The Board reviewed the composition of the seven districts as per the Bylaws and declared them as equal.

Jenny discussed the RFP she sent out to four different architecture firms. A lengthy discussion was held. The Board accepted Mohagen Hansen's design proposal.

Jonathan Messner, Manager of Member Services, reported on activities of his department for the month. He discussed load control for the month. He stated that the ALM project is complete with the exception of just a handful of devices. He stated that Agralite hosted Co-ops in the Classroom for grades 4-6 in Ortonville on February 8th. He discussed an uptick in calls for high bills due to the extreme cold in January. He stated that Basin scholarships were due February 21st and we received 13 applications. He stated that Youth Tour applications were due February 21st and none were received. The board voted to rescind our commitment with MREA.

Stephanie Wroblewski, Manager of Finance/CFO, discussed margins for the month of January. She discussed patronage updates. She brought forth updated CoBank

## LINEWORKER SAFETY GEAR WORD SEARCH



Lineworkers use a variety of gear to stay safe while working near power lines and other electrical equipment. Read about their safety gear below, then find and circle the **blue** words in the puzzle.

- Safety **goggles** keep debris out of a lineworker's eyes while they work.
- Rubber **gloves** are insulated and protect lineworkers from electric shock.
- Steel toe **boots** provide extra protection when lineworkers lift heavy objects.
- **Hard hats** protect lineworkers from potential head injuries.
- Lineworkers wear a safety **harness** to prevent falls while climbing poles or working in a bucket.
- Lineworkers use a **hot stick**, an insulated tool made from fiberglass, when working on energized lines.



Incumbency Certification and the Board approved it.

The financials were given by Stephanie with a PowerPoint presentation.

Tom Hoffman, Manager of Engineering & Operations, reported on activities of his department for the month. He discussed line crew projects and outages for the month. He discussed the infrastructure grants he has been working on. He stated that the 2-acre parcel in Section 16 of Hodges Township has been purchased for a new 115Kv Substation. He discussed a new project for Riverview Farms. He stated there have been 11 requests for new irrigation services for this year so far.

Aaron Clayton, CPA, with Eide Bailly, joined the meeting via Zoom to present the 2023 Audit Report and the Board approved it.

Tom brought forth 2024 Substation Maintenance contract, 2024 Pole Inspection contract, and 2024

Pad-Mount Inspection and Maintenance contract with STAR Energy Services; 2024 Underground Construction contract with Integrity Contracting; and 2024 ROW Clearing contract and 2024 Foliar Spraying contract with Carr's Tree Service and the Board approved them all.

Tom gave the safety report.

Board Policies 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, and 127 were reviewed and the Board approved the recommended updates.

Jenny Stryhn, General Manager/CEO, reviewed her report to the board. She discussed load management. She discussed recent meetings she attended including Basin, East River Energize Forum, and the GRE Region Meeting. She discussed WAPA capacity.

The March board meeting was set for the 28th.

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