

M I N N K O T A

MESSENGER



SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2025



4 ROBOTS IN THE DAIRY BARN

A new dairy facility near Trail, Minnesota, is leveraging cutting-edge technology to keep the local industry churning. See how JW Vett Farms has harnessed automation to streamline milking, feeding and cleaning.

On the cover: A dairy cow at JW Vett Farms models her transmitter collar, which collects data about her milking schedule, health and more.

Minnkota Messenger is published six times a year by Minnkota Power Cooperative. Its mission is to communicate Minnkota's perspectives and concerns to its members, elected officials, employees and other business audiences. For editorial inquiries, call (701) 795-4282 or email bfladhammer@minnkota.com.

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Minnkota Power Cooperative is a generation and transmission cooperative headquartered in Grand Forks, North Dakota. It supplies wholesale electricity to 11 member-owner distribution cooperatives, three in eastern North Dakota and eight in northwestern Minnesota. Minnkota also serves as operating agent for the Northern Municipal Power Agency, an association of 12 municipal utilities in the same service region. Together, the Joint System serves more than 169,000 consumers.

MESSENGER STAFF

Editor
Ben Fladhammer

Contributing Writers
Kaylee Cusack
Emily Windjue

Graphic Designer
Jennifer Erickson

Photography
Michael Hoeft

Printing & Mailing
Troy Ahonen
Travis McCleish

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Can you put happiness in a cup? You certainly can at Blyss Flower Farm in Ada, Minnesota, where the blooms are yours for the picking during the summer and fall months.

ROBOTS IN THE DAIRY BARN

Red Lake Electric Cooperative member JW Vett Farms finds dairy efficiency in automation

By Kaylee Cusack
Photography Michael Hoeft

Imagine your workplace had touch-activated back scratchers, robots that brought you food every few hours, water beds for resting and free Starbucks for a job well done. That kind of environment would likely increase your productivity.

A step into the JW Vett Farms dairy facility reveals just this kind of cutting-edge oasis. For cows.

As a cow sauntered into one of eight automated robotic milking bays, co-owner Wyatt Vettleson explained her heightened work ethic.

"They're getting a shot of feed in there. It's like when you get coffee in the morning; that gives you your jolt to go. It's the same



Once the feed is mixed, the feeder robots circle the barn, dropping it along the perimeter.

thing. It's giving the cows energy," he said. He mentioned that this sneaky bovine had already recently been milked, so the doors would automatically open and let her through. "She got her bite of feed. She'll probably go right back through again," he laughed.

Wyatt, along with his cousin, Josh Vettleson, opened their robotic dairy farm in Trail, Minnesota, in May 2025. The two grew up working at Wayra Dairy, a longtime operation run by Wyatt's parents, Wayne and Deb. The cousins bought into Wayra Dairy in 2018, and as retirement neared for Wayne and Deb, Wyatt and Josh started envisioning a more modern future for the farm.

After years of research and dairy convention connections, the Vettleson cousins broke ground for a new state-of-the-art dairy facility, just south of the old Wayra Dairy barns. Completed less than a year later, JW Vett Farms incorporates the old milking parlor of 120 cows and a new robotic facility that houses 440 more.

"We started milking on May 20. It was my sister's birthday, which was kind of funny," Wyatt recalled. "I'll always remember it that way."



The new dairy facility (bottom left) more than triples the capacity of the original milking parlor.



Josh Vettleson (left) and Wyatt Vettleson stand in the center of their new robotic dairy facility in Trail, Minnesota.

Dairy data

JW Vett Farms worked closely with Leedstone, a regional provider of robotics and automation equipment built for dairy farms. The new facility features eight robotic milkers, two automated feeding systems with four mixing and feeding robots, six robotic barn cleaners and a large cross-ventilation system to keep the barn cool and free of flies.

The automation of everyday processes was one of the primary reasons the Vettlesons invested in the new facility. Wyatt says it's

becoming increasingly difficult to find people to work in dairy in northern Minnesota, and the cost to pay them continues to climb.

But Wyatt and Josh quickly realized an invaluable additional benefit of the system. Every cow is given a radio-transmitted collar that tracks every visit to the milking bay, how much milk is produced, how much they eat, how long they rest and other recordables.

"The data is key," Josh said, adding that they no longer need to physically be in the parlor every morning and night, as they have a camera system throughout the barn. He pointed to a screen in the office, showing several live images that can also be monitored by smartphone. "You can sit down here for 10 minutes and look at everything you've seen in a parlor. It's all on there, with alerts. It's a lot to learn, but it's all there."

As much as the high-tech system has boosted productivity for the Vettlesons, the cows are also



benefitting from the new digs. The floor is constantly cleared of manure by robots, the resting areas are outfitted with water mattresses and neck-rail pillows, and several automated cattle brushes await the backs and rumps that need scratching.

When it comes time for milking, the cows enter the milking bays when they feel like it. A three-layer laser system scans the udders for a gentle brush cleaning and then attaches the milking cups quickly and accurately.

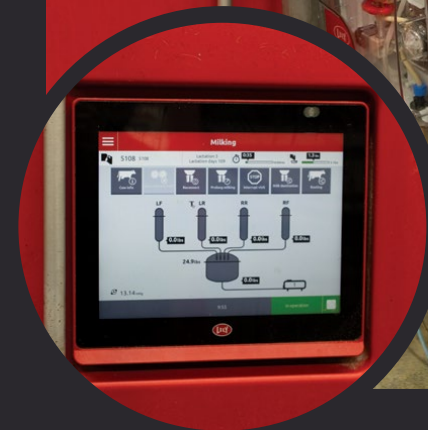
"The cows have adapted to it extremely well, as far as entering their robots on their own," Josh said.

"They're just happy. Cows chew their cud when they're happy, and we can see all that data. We look on here to see what the rumination time is for them," Wyatt said, referring to the information on his screen.

Using the data they've collected so far, the cousins have recorded a nearly 10% increase in milk production during their time in the new facility. And they're not sacrificing quality for quantity.

"The quality of the milk that we're sending out is really good. The different components we utilize make good cheese," Wyatt said, noting that their homegrown feed is a large part of the equation. The milk is sold to Land O'Lakes and is often

Each of the eight robotic bays takes data on every milking, including production from each connection.



turned into Bongards cheese in Perham, Minnesota. "For long-term sustainability, ice cream and cheese are the way to go. I mean, everyone loves it, right? That's what drives this market."

Elevating the industry

A fully automated dairy operation takes a lot of electricity. JW Vett Farms looked to its power partners at Red Lake Electric Co-operative (RLEC) to create a plan for long-term reliability. With the co-op's help, the cousins determined they would need to elevate the farm from one-phase power to three-phase power. RLEC upgraded more than six miles of line and helped install a new transformer.

"They've always been a member of ours, and they're always one of our top users," said RLEC Manager of Member Services Kelli Brateng. "It's nice to see them continue to enhance this operation, because dairy farmers are dropping off in northern Minnesota. We only have a handful left in our service territory, so it's encouraging to

see them move forward in the industry."

For those neighbors who are still milking, and doing so the old way, JW Vett Farms has become the talk of the trade.

"The neatest thing we've seen so far is the dairy farmers that are retired, how they want to see it," Wyatt said. "One of the guys walking around here today is a local dairy farmer, and he brought a friend over to show around."

The Vettleson cousins took a risk by investing in the dairy farm of tomorrow. A dairy parlor run by robots would have been unheard of in the generations before them. Perhaps even scoffed at. However, they understood that in order for their history to continue, they'd have to step into the future.

"For me, this is what I know. It's what I grew up with," Wyatt said. "This is kind of what we've done our whole lives, so it just seemed like the right thing to do."



A robotic system grabs hay and corn silage to be mixed within a feeder robot.

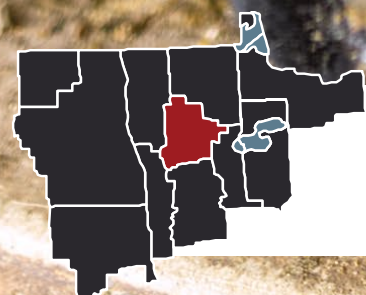


Automated bristle scratchers both relax and clean the cows.

“

“Dairy farming is a 24/7 job. But now that it's in your hand on your phone, it makes that 24/7 job a little bit easier.”

Wyatt Vettleson
JW Vett Farms



Served by
RED LAKE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Red Lake Falls, Minnesota

Incorporated: July 30, 1938
Board members: 9
Members: 5,813
Miles of line: 2,668

ELEVATING THE LOCAL ELEVATOR

Wild Rice Electric powers cutting-edge CHS grain facility expansion in Erskine, Minnesota

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft

There's a simple nostalgia that comes with a Minnesota harvest season. It summons visions of a late evening run of sandwiches out to the wheat fields. Perhaps a flicker of drying corn stalks, or the dust kicked up by grain trucks on prairie roads.

Those images all remain in 2025. But with the newly expanded CHS grain elevator facility in Erskine, Minnesota, the cooperative is introducing state-of-the-

art technology into the region's oldest industry.

"This is our main dump station," said Operations Manager Jesse Bushelle, pointing to a glowing screen of illustrated cylinders. "That's all our bins, and the different levels and colors show what commodity and how many bushels are in there. We have them color coded so we know what they are: Blue is oats, orange is wheat, yellow is corn, green is soybeans."

Enhanced grain segregation technology is just one piece of the major elevator expansion, the construction of which began in 2022 and lasted nearly two years. The project included a new concrete workhouse with several new grain bins and grain legs, a second grain dryer, three additional dumping bays and an underground belt conveyor system. The old and new facilities are connected and work seamlessly together, allowing grain to be unloaded quickly, sorted and stored

automatically, and loaded into trains efficiently.

Originally, the elevator had five steel bins with the capacity to hold around a million bushels of grain. In 2014, CHS added another 650,000-bushel steel bin. The additional storage capacity was great, but it didn't fix a core issue facing the Erskine team. They needed a better system of grain segregation to speed up the loading process.





The new Badger substation sits just south of the Erskine grain facility.



Operations Manager Jesse Bushelle (left) and Operations Supervisor Kent Bergerson lead the Erskine team.

"Before the expansion, it would take 14-15 hours to load a train," said Kent Bergerson, operations supervisor for the Erskine site. He noted that many trains could only give them a 24-hour loading window, so if a train came in at 11 p.m., the employees would have to start loading it at 11 p.m.

With the concrete expansion, the Erskine facility was able to cut its loading time down by more than 50%. If everything goes right, they can now load a train in just five and a half hours.

The benefits to the local farmers (who are CHS owners in its co-op model) are also substantial. With 1.15 million bushels more capacity and a faster dumping process, CHS has been able to reduce grain truck waiting lines during harvest.

"I had a guy come in here about halfway through wheat har-

vest and say, 'Why aren't you dumping any grain? Every time I come here, there are no trucks,'" Bushelle said. "We had to explain we're dumping just as much as we did the previous year, it's just that we have a more streamlined process."

The ability for farmers to dump grain on demand gives them the flexibility to visit the elevator when they want, however many times they need. The space and fluidity of the system will allow CHS in Erskine to double the number of bushels processed in 2025. It also allows the Erskine team to be ready to take advantage of an empty train coming through northern Minnesota. "We can get an extra freight haul just because we're ready for it," Bergerson said. "We have the capacity, we have the commodity on hand, and we can load basically on demand now."

Innovation partners

Like most modern industries, agriculture is quickly being reshaped by innovation and technology. With producers doing more, faster, and with fewer people, CHS recognized it would need to evolve to be able to meet farmers' needs.

"We're trying to keep up with the technology that they're using," Bushelle said. "They need to be able to plant and harvest crops as fast as they can in as little timeframe as possible with as big of equipment as they can. We need to be able to take it and ship it out as fast as we can to make that work for them."

The Erskine elevator expansion was a leap into the next generation of farm technology. "We have one of the newest, most state-of-the-art elevators that CHS has, so we have grain movement and storage options that just weren't available to us before," Bushelle added.

To help power their growth and modernization efforts,

CHS teamed up with fellow co-op Wild Rice Electric Cooperative (WREC). Together, they assessed the electricity needs of the planned expansion and determined a new, on-site substation would be critical to keep power reliable.

With the additional help of Minnkota Power Cooperative, Badger distribution substation was constructed just south of the elevator. As Minnkota finished the substation in the summer of 2024, WREC crews installed new underground distribution feeders and a dedicated circuit to serve the facility. The new substation also supports enhanced reliability for WREC's regional members.

"CHS has long been a vital part of our membership, providing our local farmers efficient ways to move grain," said WREC Director of Member Services & Communications Tommy Houdek. "Wild Rice Electric is an agriculturally strong cooperative, with many members relying on both WREC and CHS to help keep their businesses and farms running smoothly."

Cooperative values have kept grain elevators and electric co-ops the backbone of rural life in Minnesota. For nearly 100 years, both have worked toward the goal of service. And when grain elevators and electric co-ops work together, incredible things come into focus.

"We want people to know what service this grain elevator provides and what it means to a customer from the inside looking out – not just driving by on Highway 2, where you see a big block of concrete," Bergerson said. "We want them to know how our team helps the community and supports the farmers in the area."



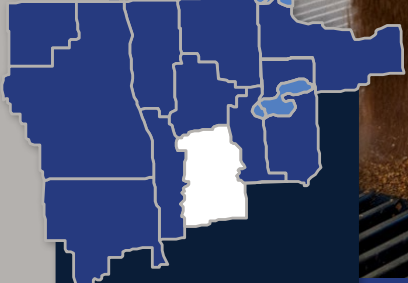
Ben Allred, North Dakota Grain Inspection, takes a look at the freshly loaded freight.



Derek Holthusen samples an incoming grain load for quality and moisture content.



The new elevator boot (or basement) offers more working space and creates less dust.



Served by
**WILD RICE
ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE**
Mahanomen,
Minnesota

Incorporated:
October 6, 1939
Board members: 9
President/CEO:
Mike Wade
Members: 14,801
Miles of line: 3,650



Enhanced data collection and grain segregation helps CHS operators streamline processes.



A rendering of Applied Digital's planned AI data center located in Harwood, North Dakota

APPLIED DIGITAL BREAKS GROUND ON \$3 BILLION AI FACTORY

Cass County Electric, Minnkota to supply electricity for 280-MW facility near Harwood, ND

By Ben Fladhammer

On the outskirts of Harwood, North Dakota, construction is underway on a massive new computing campus that could reshape the region's role in artificial

intelligence. Applied Digital has broken ground on Polaris Forge 2, a \$3 billion "AI Factory" that will operate at a peak load of 280 megawatts.

When the facility comes online in 2026 and reaches full capacity in early 2027, it will be powered by electricity from the cooperative system. Minnkota will provide the wholesale supply

to its member-owner Cass County Electric Cooperative, which will deliver retail service to the site.

"We're proud to work with Applied Digital to help bring a state-of-the-art data center to our region," said Mac McLennan, Minnkota Power Cooperative President and CEO. "This project represents an important opportunity to drive technological progress and create lasting benefits for our cooperative membership. As we work toward a final agreement, our focus is on making sure it is integrated in a way that strengthens our communities, supports reliable and responsible power, and builds on the strong foundation we have established through more than 85 years of service to this region."

Working together, Minnkota and Cass County Electric see the addition of the data center as a benefit for the traditional membership of homes, farms, schools and businesses. By contributing substantially to the fixed costs of operating the grid, large consumers like Applied Digital help spread expenses across more users, which can ease the upward pressure on electric rates.

"We are excited to have the opportunity to provide Applied Digital with the power they need to drive innovation and technology in a way that benefits our communities and legacy members," said Paul Matthys, Cass County Electric Cooperative president and CEO. "As we work through the final stages of an agreement, we will continue to keep our cooperative values at heart while preparing to meet the needs of future generations."

Why North Dakota?

Applied Digital is developing the project on 160 acres, with additional land available for potential future expansion. At full operation, more than 200 people will work at the site, in addition to long-term contractors.

The Harwood project is an extension of Applied Digital's earlier investment in Ellendale, North Dakota, where Polaris Forge 1 is already helping to establish the state as a hub for advanced computing.

"We believe Polaris Forge 2 represents the next stage in Applied Digital's rapid growth and our position as a leader in delivering high-performance AI infrastructure," said Wes Cummins, CEO of Applied Digital. "The demand for AI capacity continues to accelerate, and North Dakota continues to be one of the most strategic locations in the country to meet that need."

North Dakota has quickly become a natural home for advanced computing projects. The state offers the key ingredients that large-scale data centers require, including affordable and reliable energy, wide-open land, a cold climate that aids in cooling massive computer systems and a workforce ready to embrace new opportunities.

North Dakota Gov. Kelly Armstrong sees it as a natural fit.

"North Dakota wins when companies like Applied Digital choose to be more than an employer," Armstrong said. "In Ellendale, they invested in people through workforce housing and created

strong local partnerships that strengthen the community. We're excited that they are committing to expanding their presence in North Dakota with a Harwood location, continuing the trend of being a positive corporate citizen and helping to develop our rural communities while contributing to our strong economy."

The promise of jobs and investment has energized local leaders. The Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation has already conducted workforce studies, confident the region can supply the technical talent to keep the facility running.

"The Greater Fargo Moorhead EDC is excited about the opportunity to support this preliminary dynamic project for our region," said Joe Raso, GFMEDC President & CEO. "Having worked with Applied Digital on various aspects of this project, including a recent visit to their Ellendale data center currently under construction, we can see the substantial economic benefit this project will have for the greater Fargo region."

For Harwood, the project underscores how even a small community can play a central role in the next wave of transformational technology.

"This groundbreaking marks the start of a project that will put Harwood on the map as a key player in the future of AI infrastructure," said Blake Hankey, mayor of Harwood. "Applied Digital's investment reflects confidence in our people and our potential, and we're proud to be part of this moment."

DATA CENTERS & ELECTRIC RATES

MYTH

"DATA CENTERS WILL DRIVE UP MY ELECTRICITY COSTS."

REALITY

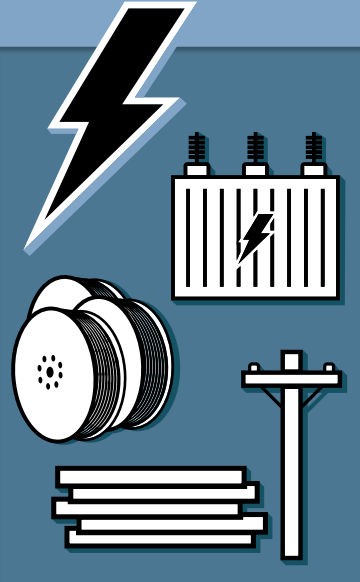
DATA CENTERS CAN ACTUALLY HELP KEEP ELECTRIC RATES STABLE.

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING:

1

Most of your electric bill is made up of "fixed costs"

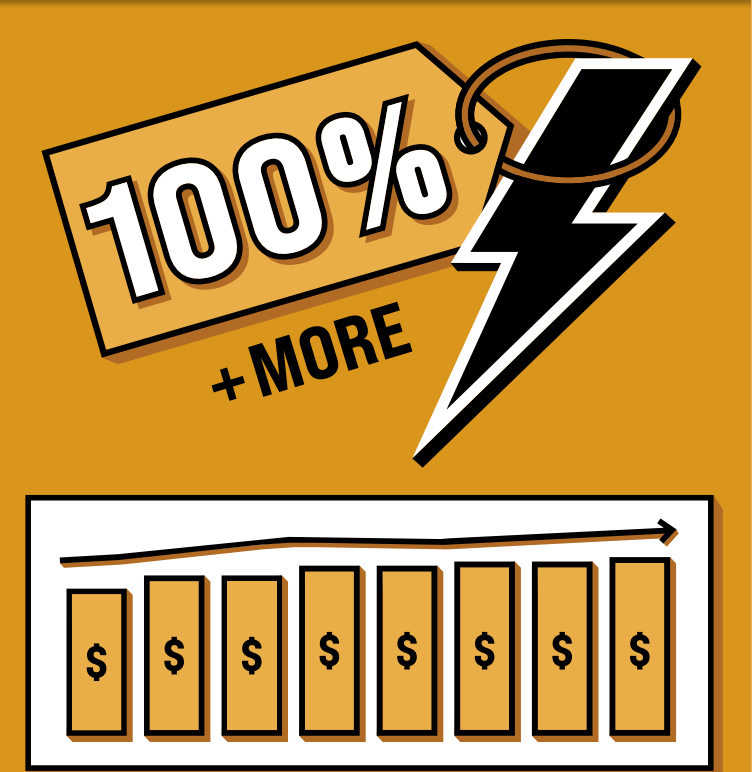
When you pay your electric bill, you're not just paying for the power flowing into your home or business. You're also paying for the power plants, poles, wires, substations and other infrastructure that make the generation and delivery of that power possible. These are long-term investments, known as "fixed costs," that get paid for over decades, much like a mortgage. Every electric consumer contributes to those costs.



2

Large electric consumers help cover these fixed costs

When a large customer – like a data center – connects to our system, they pay 100% of the new equipment they require (so others are not covering their upgrades). They also chip in heavily toward the existing system's fixed costs. That means the more they pay into the system, the less pressure there is on regular consumers. Their contributions can help keep rates stable and lessen the need for future increases.

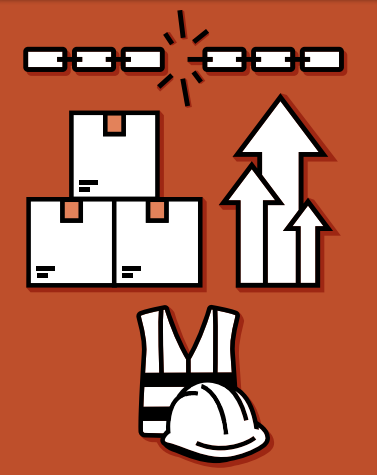


3

Rates may still go up for other reasons

Does this mean rates *never* go up again? No.

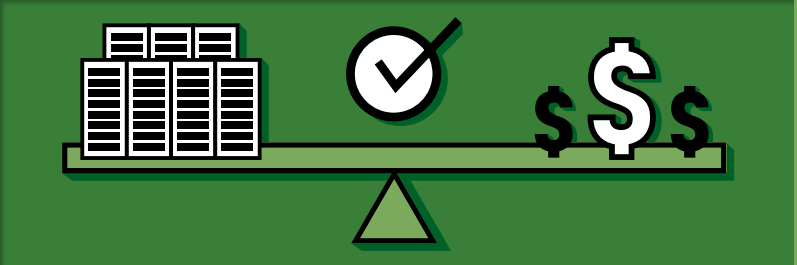
Factors like supply chain challenges, inflation and rising costs of labor and materials are pushing expenses higher across the entire industry. But the key is that data centers help limit the impacts. Without their contributions, those increases could be even steeper for everyone else.



4

Takeaway

With the right partnerships and structures, data centers aren't placing undue pressure on electric rates. By paying their fair share, they're helping stabilize costs for all of us.



MINNKOTA LAUNCHES WATCH THE WIRES

Safety campaign
aims to reduce
pole collisions and
power line contacts
in co-op country

By Kaylee Cusack
Photography Michael Hoeft

Minnkota Power Co-operative is proud to announce the launch of its latest public safety initiative, Watch the Wires, in partnership with its member cooperatives across eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota.

This new campaign is designed to reduce the number of public incidents involving electrical infrastructure, with a special focus on agricultural safety. As farm equipment becomes larger and more automated, rural electric co-ops have seen a significant increase in line contacts in the region. In fact, public transmission line incidents have more than doubled in the past five years. These contacts have the potential to turn deadly if a driver or operator leaves the vehicle without taking the proper precautions.

IF YOU HIT A POWER LINE OR POLE:

- 1 Stay inside the cab**
- 2 Call 9-1-1**
- 3 Wait for responders**

IF THERE IS SMOKE/FIRE:



Cross your arms across your chest



Jump out with your feet together (don't touch the ground and vehicle at the same time)



Shuffle or bunny hop far away (feet always together)



WATCHTHEWIRES.COM

An image of the Watch the Wires safety procedure sticker contained in Watch the Wires safety kits

The campaign's key goals include reducing overhead line contacts, pole strikes, guy wire clipping and underground line contacts (e.g., digging accidents). If contact occurs, the campaign includes steps to safely escape the situation.

"Through the Watch the Wires campaign, it is our hope that people will have a greater awareness

of the presence of, as well as the risks associated with contacting, power lines and poles," said Minnkota Safety Manager Jason Uhler. "The campaign provides important information should someone find themselves involved in a power line- or pole-related incident. Knowing the proper steps to take can be the difference between life and death."

To support the effort, Minnkota has developed Watch the Wires safety kits that will made available without cost* to farmers, contractors, and other interested entities and individuals. The safety kits include:

- Safety briefing documents
- Wallet contact cards
- Safety procedure stickers
- Window clings
- Magnets
- Phone pouches

- Can koozies
- Notepads
- Optional: Field/approach signs

Minnkota's Safety team has also developed a Watch the Wires interactive tabletop demonstration to share with local schools and youth groups. The demo shows what can happen when vehicles and equipment come too close to power lines, using real electrical currents.

These materials are intended for outreach, education and visibility in the communities Minnkota and its members serve. You can see more about the campaign at **WatchtheWires.com** or **Minnkota.com**.

Let's continue working together to keep our communities safe and aware. **Watch the wires – every time, everywhere.**

**Large or special requests may be subject to an additional fee.*



A LOCAL SOURCE OF BLYSS

Alyssa Johnson and daughter Esley welcome visitors to Blyss Flower Farm near Ada, Minnesota.

Red River Valley Co-op Power member Blyss Flower Farm fosters community connections

By Kaylee Cusack
Photography Michael Hoeft

If you picked just the right August evening to visit Blyss Flower Farm near Ada, Minnesota, you may have found love amid the blooms.

Two Loves, actually.

"I think those dark purple flowers there would be really good for fill in," Emily Love told her mother-in-law Julie Love as they assembled bouquet cups of freshly snipped flowers. The duo from Crookston, Minnesota, decided to attend a Tuesday You-Pick event at the flower farm after feeling some Instagram envy from a friend's visit.

"I told her we needed to come here next Tuesday, which is today," Emily said. "It's beautiful here."

These moments of connection – with nature, with friends, with family – were what Alyssa Johnson envisioned when she established Blyss Flower Farm on the farmstead she shares with her husband and two children. In the fall of 2020, Johnson planted her first few hundred tulips in what used to be her vegetable garden. After they bloomed in the spring, she decided to go even bigger with



(Above) Emily Love walks the zinnia field for the perfect petals.

(Right) Alyssa Johnson explains the you-pick process to new guests.



a field of zinnias. The zinnia field turned into more of a zinnia patch as she experimented with weed management and general care.

"Every year I'm learning, but that was a year I learned a lot. I reached out to other farmers, tried to read a lot and did a lot of research. I grew a lot personally during that first growing season," Alyssa said. "It ended up being a nice little zinnia patch, and it inspired us to continue and figure out how to make it bigger and master that opportunity."

The zinnia patch has now grown into a half-acre field of pink, yellow, white and orange flowers, ready to be cut by visitors. In 2022, the Johnsons added a smaller, fenced-in area with several more flower species to build out a bou-

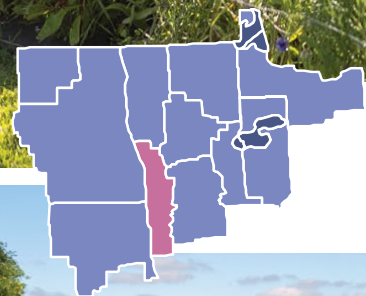
quet for any taste. Although the varieties change, Alyssa says she's found the sweet spot for plot size.

"Our family is a priority to us and comes first," said the stay-at-home mom. "We wanted to do something that's manageable for our family and is a blessing to the community and a blessing to our family – and doesn't just run us ragged."

Alyssa grows all but one of her flower varieties from seed, either indoors or in ground. Over the first two months, they need daily watering and tending to grow into healthy seedlings to be planted out.

Once planted, the flowers become more vulnerable to weather, pests and critters. The Johnsons

A group of visitors walks through the Blyss Flower Farm garden, which includes dozens of flower varieties.



Served by
RED RIVER VALLEY CO-OP POWER
Halstad, Minnesota

Incorporated: February 21, 1938
Board members: 6
CEO: Rich Whitcomb
Members: 4,853
Miles of line: 1,850



use all-natural pest deterrents and Organic Materials Review Institute-rated (OMRI) fungicides to keep the plants clear of infestation or disease while protecting local pollinators like bees and butterflies. As the flowers grow, Alyssa makes sure they get adequate water and proper support, adding netting or staking where needed.

"Then there's weeding of course. The first six weeks after seedlings are planted out are mostly spent weeding," she said with a smile. "That's the joy of those months as you anticipate the harvest."

From April through September, Blyss Flower Farm shares the yields of that hard work with the

community. The local florists enjoy picking from her fields for their arrangements and Alyssa occasionally prepares bouquets for local farmers markets, but on selected days in the summer, she opens the farm up for You-Pick events. Guests purchase a cup, grab floral shears and spend as much time as they want walking

through the flowers, cutting just the right stems for the bouquet of their dreams.

Once a summer, Blyss Flower Farm hosts Flower Fest, a large community event with food trucks, kids' activities, live music, local vendors and more. This year, the event brought over 1,000 people to the farm, some from as far away as the Twin Cities. "It was absolutely amazing," Alyssa said. "Every piece of it was just really special. I was brought to tears a couple of different times."

Although Flower Fest is high energy, most days on the farm are quiet. And that's absolutely by design.

"I'm encouraging people to slow their pace a little bit. It's so easy to let our calendars get so full, and we're running to this and that," Alyssa explained. "It's great to be connected and involved, but it's also great to just slow down and appreciate the beauty of creation."

It's that kind of zen-level bliss (or rather, blyss) that keeps people returning with their friends, their children and their mothers-in-law. Visitors understand that this little farm is a vibrant gift to Ada and the surrounding region.

"Everyone's been so supportive, from purchasing market bouquets to coming out to the farm to purchase you-pick bouquets, or on social media – sharing, liking, commenting," Alyssa said. "And in person, people are always so grateful for what this farm is for the community. It's a unique place and opportunity for all ages. It's been a real blessing."



“

“When you can get in the dirt and just connect with nature, that’s a beautiful, eye-opening experience.”

Alyssa Johnson
Blyss Flower Farm

MCLENNAN JOINS CO-OP LEADERS BACKING FEDERAL PUSH TO BOLSTER GRID RELIABILITY



Brita Endrud (farthest left), Minnkota external affairs representative, stands next to Doug Burgum, Secretary of the Interior, during a photo with North Dakota utility representatives and policymakers. Minnkota CEO Mac McLennan is second from the right in the first full row.

Mac McLennan, president and CEO of Minnkota Power Cooperative, joined other cooperative leaders at the U.S. Department of the Interior on Sept. 29 as the Trump administration unveiled new measures to bolster coal-based power generation in the face of rising electricity demand.

"We appreciate the administration's commitment to addressing the future of coal and ensuring the reliability of our nation's electric grid," McLennan said. "We are honored to have been included in this important discussion and to have the opportunity to contribute our insights. Coal remains a cornerstone of grid reliability, especially during a period of rising electricity demand driven by emerging technologies, artificial intelligence and the accelerating electrification of our economy. Reliable, affordable power is essential to sustaining this progress, and coal continues to play a critical role in meeting those needs."

The Interior Department announced it will open 13.1 million acres of federal land for coal leasing – an effort to keep reliable, dispatchable power online as demand grows. At the same time, the Department of Energy pledged \$625 million to support coal-based generation. More than half of that funding will be directed toward recommissioning or modernizing existing units, while the remainder will go to advanced wastewater treatment systems and technology to enable coal plants to co-fire with other fuels.

The Environmental Protection Agency said it will seek public input on ways to streamline its Regional Haze Rule, while also extending compliance deadlines for its power plant wastewater rule. Earlier this year, the EPA began rolling back or revising the Biden administration's greenhouse gas and mercury emissions standards for power plants, which many

in the industry warned would increase costs and could force the early retirement of needed generating units.

The policy shift comes amid growing concern over grid reliability. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation projects peak power demand will climb 17% over the next decade even as more than 115,000 megawatts of always-available generation is slated to retire.

"As electricity demand skyrockets, smart energy policies that help keep the lights on are more important than ever," said Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). "These announcements give electric co-ops important flexibility to reliably meet growing energy needs at a cost local families and businesses can afford."

MCLENNAN RECEIVES NRECA OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Minnkota Power Cooperative President and CEO Mac McLennan has been recognized with the NRECA Regional Award for Outstanding Service, one of the highest honors in the nation's cooperative network. The award was presented Sept. 24 by Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), during the NRECA Regions 5/6 Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin.

The regional award is given to individuals who demonstrate an enduring commitment to cooperative values and a proven record of service to members. McLennan has dedicated more than 30 years to the electric cooperative program, including nearly 15 years leading Minnkota.

McLennan was nominated by the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) board of directors. In

its nomination letter, the board described McLennan as a "transformational leader" whose career has blended technical expertise, deep policy understanding and a unique ability to unite people around forward-thinking strategies.

McLennan's cooperative journey has spanned a variety of leadership roles, including service as director of environmental affairs for NRECA and as vice president of a generation and transmission cooperative in Colorado.



NRECA CEO Jim Matheson presents Mac McLennan with the Regional Award for Outstanding Service.

PRESIDENT APPROVES DISASTER DECLARATION FOR NORTH DAKOTA



North Dakota's presidential disaster declaration request from June's storms and tornadoes has been approved.

The North Dakota Department of Emergency Services learned Sept. 11 that President Donald Trump approved Gov. Kelly Armstrong's request, unlocking critical federal assistance to help cover the costs of repairs to public infrastructure and recovery assistance.

The June 20-21 storms caused substantial damage to Minnkota's

transmission system and generated more than \$11 million in damage to infrastructure in the state. Minnkota had 91 substations out of service during the event and significant damage to 139 transmission structures.

The presidential declaration makes public assistance available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which electric cooperatives have deemed critical for rural communities.



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