

Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association

# SPARKS

August/September 2025

*A local  
source of blyss*

PAGE 4



# SPARKS

Red River Valley Co-op Power is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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August/September 2025  
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Halstad, Minnesota (USPS 509-300)

## OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

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Curt Stubstad ..... Sabin  
Vice Chairman

Bob Kinkade ..... Ada  
Secretary-Treasurer

Roger Krostue ..... Fisher

Trevor Sorby ..... Glyndon

Kelsey Jensen ..... Moorhead

Rich Whitcomb  
Chief Executive Officer

## Scheduled Board Meeting

Board meetings are held in Halstad at the cooperative office starting at 8:30 a.m. on the next-to-last Monday of each month.

**Outages:**  
**800-788-7784**

**On the cover:** Alyssa Johnson of Ada, Minnesota, stands before a half-acre field of zinnias, a cornerstone of Blyss Flower Farm. Johnson established the rural business with her family in 2020.



## Important work continues/ rate pressures remain

by Rich Whitcomb, CEO

Your cooperative's crews and employees are working diligently to complete this season's round of new services, upgrades and reliability improvements.

The 7.5-mile three-phase overhead to underground project between Halstad and Hendrum has now been energized and is serving as a main backbone to that area's members. The project is a 75/25% cost share between FEMA and the cooperative. Only retiring the old overhead poles remains.

Grain bin projects, general new services and upgrade work will continue until freeze up. Additionally, Red River Valley Co-op Power has replaced 75 poles this summer due to severe weather events, mostly in Norman and Polk counties. And our contracted tree trimming company continues to work at various locations to ensure vegetation in and along rights of way remains manageable. As usual, it's been a busy and productive year.

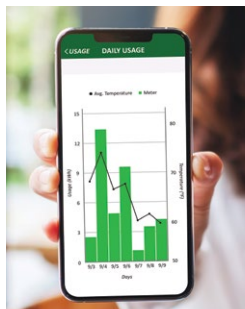
## Rate pressures continue

With respect to rates, an adjustment come January seems very likely for a couple reasons.

First, our 6.8% overall rate increase in January (largely due to an 8.3% wholesale power increase) was meant to cover only this year. The wholesale power rate adjusted April 1, so 2026 will represent the first full year of the effects from the wholesale power side. We have to account for that.

Second, all the pressures related to inflation, supply chain and weather variability remain (see page 3 for a general look). Costs still continue to rise year-over-year in some fashion. The possibility also remains for a small increase from Minnkota Power Cooperative (wholesale power supplier) for 2026.

To help offset these challenges, staff has secured reliability grant projects and delayed some budgeted items, while working toward finding areas of growth in an effort to stretch your dollar further. As the year progresses, we will keep you informed on our path to balance competitive rates with excellent service and strong reliability.



## YOU HAVE THE POWER TO:

- View daily and monthly energy use.
- View and pay your bills online.
- Go paperless and receive an email notice when your bill is ready to view.
- Compare energy use to changes in temperature.



Sign up for SmartHub: [rrvcoop.com](http://rrvcoop.com)

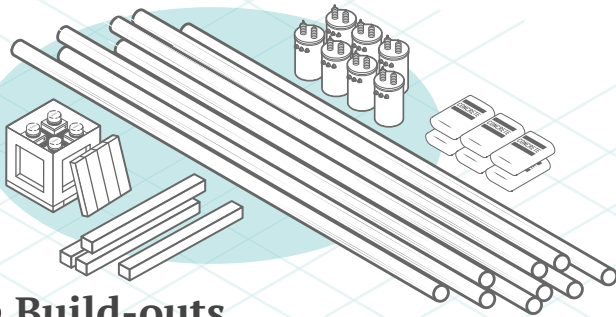


# Cost Increases

The past five years have been a period of exploding costs for the electric utility industry and for broadband providers, pushed by soaring demand, supply chain challenges, raw materials shortages, increased labor costs and tariffs. The impact has been rapid increases in the cost of producing power, longer and more unpredictable project timelines and the need for more financing, all of which have driven electric rates up for residences, businesses and other end-users. Here's a look at what's contributing to the trend. **Percent increase since 2020:**

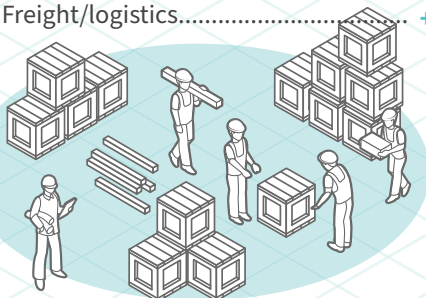
## ● Infrastructure

Utility poles (wood, steel, composite)	+25–40%
Crossarms & braces (steel/wood).....	+20–35%
Conductor wire (aluminum/copper)...	+30–50%
Transformers.....	+70–100%
Grain-oriented electrical steel.....	+80–100%
Oil/dielectric fluids.....	+25–40%
Copper wiring.....	+50%
Concrete.....	+25–35%
Smart meters.....	+20–35%
Pad-mounted switchgear.....	+25–40%
Circuit breakers/reclosers.....	+20–35%



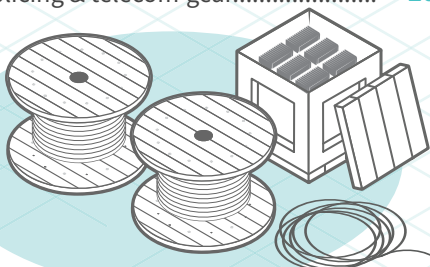
## ● Build-outs

Utility construction labor.....	+20–40%
Freight/logistics.....	+30–60%



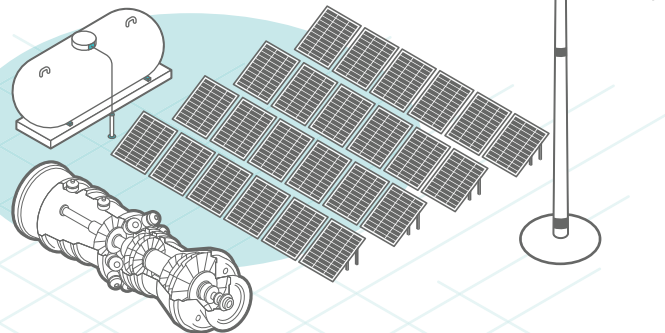
## ● Broadband

Fiber-optic cable.....	+25–40%
Splicing & telecom gear.....	+20–30%



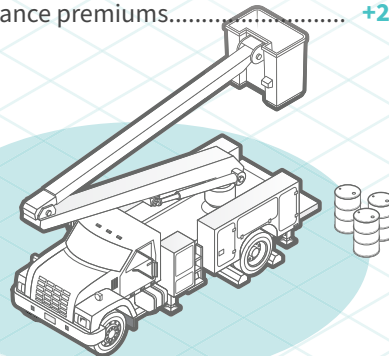
## ● Generation

Diesel gensets.....	+20–40%
Gas turbines.....	+20–30%
Solar PV systems.....	+25–35%
Wind turbines.....	+25–35%
Hydropower components.....	+20–30%
Battery storage.....	+25–40%
SCADA/EMS systems.....	+20–30%
Inverters.....	+20–30%
Relays & switchgear.....	+25–40%
Natural Gas.....	+20–120%
Coal.....	+30–60%
Diesel/fuel oil.....	+40–70%



## ● Fleets

Light trucks.....	+25–40%
Bucket trucks, digger derricks .....	+20–50%
Fuel costs (especially diesel).....	+20–30%
Maintenance.....	+15–25%
Insurance premiums.....	+20%



Sources: BLS; energynews.com; Reuters; Wood Mackenzie; NREL; IEA



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

# *A local source of blyss*

## RED RIVER VALLEY CO-OP POWER MEMBER **BLYSS FLOWER FARM** FOSTERS COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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

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 bouquet 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 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.

Vistors 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."



# LOOK UP FOR POWER LINES THIS HARVEST SEASON

Harvest is one of the busiest times of the year in our region, but no one is ever too busy to be reminded about the importance of electrical safety. Don't fall powerless to power lines by not taking the time to look up for potential hazards. Here are some simple things to keep everyone safe this harvest season.

LOCATE AND IDENTIFY	WORK AT A SAFE DISTANCE	LOWER BEFORE YOU GO	STAY AWAY AND STAY CALM
Make sure you, your family and your farm workers know where power lines are located on your property. Everyone should know the height of all your farm equipment and how high nearby power lines are to prevent accidental contact. If you need to work close to an energized line, use a spotter to make sure you and your equipment remain safe. Non-metallic items such as lumber, rubber and hay can conduct electricity depending on the dampness or dust contamination.	It is best to always assume a power line is energized and dangerous. Make sure everyone understands that any contact with these lines creates a path to the ground for electricity and carries the potential for a serious - even fatal - accident. A good rule of thumb is to stay at least 10 feet away from all power lines.	Lowering your equipment to the lowest possible setting is one way to not fall powerless to power lines. Make sure that extensions, portable augers and other equipment are under 14 feet tall before transporting. Wind or uneven ground can cause you to lose control of extended equipment and possibly make contact with a power line.	If your equipment ever comes in contact with an electric pole, do not get out and examine it. Call 9-1-1 and wait until the line has been de-energized before exiting your equipment. If your equipment catches fire or it is no longer safe to remain inside, do not touch any part of it as you attempt to exit. Cross your arms over your chest to protect yourself from creating any electrical pathways and jump clear of the equipment with both feet together. Bunny hop as far as you can away from your equipment keeping your feet together.







# ELECTRIC CO-OPS ACTIVE AT MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 2025 Minnesota legislative session concluded on June 9 after a brief special session to finalize the state budget. Throughout the session, Red River Valley Co-op Power advocated alongside other electric cooperatives in the state to ensure policies help retain reliable, affordable and sustainable energy.

Tragically, just days after lawmakers returned home, Minnesota was shaken by the senseless deaths of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, along with their rescue dog, Gilbert. Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette, were also injured in the same attack. Speaker Hortman was a respected leader and longtime collaborator with electric cooperatives, while Sen. Hoffman has been a bipartisan partner and steadfast supporter of rural electric co-ops. We mourn this terrible loss and extend our heartfelt condolences to their families and communities.

Even as Minnesota deals with this tragedy, it's important to reflect on the work accomplished during the legislative session – especially on issues that matter to electric cooperatives and the communities they serve.

## ★ **PROTECTING RELIABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY** ★

Electric cooperatives worked to advance practical energy policy while defeating several proposals that would have imposed unnecessary costs on co-op member-owners. One of our top priorities was reforming Minnesota's outdated net metering law. Under current policy, electric cooperatives are required to pay above-market retail rates for excess rooftop solar energy, shifting costs to co-op members without solar panels. Although legislation to modernize this inequity didn't make it into the final budget, it gained strong momentum and we'll keep pushing in 2026.

Another key issue was lifting Minnesota's longstanding moratorium on new nuclear energy. Electric cooperatives co-founded the Minnesota Nuclear Energy Alliance, a coalition of nearly 40 stakeholders representing utilities, labor, business and environmental interests. Together, we advocated for access to next-generation nuclear power – a carbon-free, reliable solution to help meet the state's energy needs. While the moratorium remains, support is growing, and the conversation is moving forward.

## ★ **KEY LEGISLATIVE WINS** ★

- **Property tax fairness:** A major highlight of the session was the passage of a property tax clarification bill for electric cooperatives. This long-overdue fix ensures fair taxation of electric cooperative infrastructure and will save millions of dollars over time, while protecting rural investments and member-owner wallets.
- **No new mandates:** Electric cooperatives successfully opposed multiple proposals that would have added costly regulatory burdens, preserving the local control that defines our member-governed utilities.

## ★ **AS A CO-OP MEMBER, MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD** ★

Much of this year's success was made possible through active participation from cooperative members, directors and local leaders. As preparations begin for the 2026 legislative session, electric cooperatives remain committed to advocating for policies that support a reliable, affordable and commonsense energy future for all members.



**RED RIVER VALLEY  
CO-OP POWER**

## COLD WEATHER RULE

In accordance with Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule (216B.097), electric service cannot be disconnected for nonpayment between **Oct. 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 Red River Valley Co-op Power or by the local energy assistance provider (see below).
- You enter into and make reasonable and 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 Red River Valley Co-op Power.

**Please note that the Cold Weather Rule does not completely stop winter disconnects.**

Before disconnecting electric service to residential members between Oct. 1 and April 30, Red River Valley Co-op Power must provide:

- **A 30-day mailed notice or 15-day hand-delivered notice**
- **A statement of members' rights and responsibilities**
- **A list of local energy assistance providers**
- **Forms to request Cold Weather Rule protection**
- **A statement explaining available payment plans and other options to continue service**

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

This program is federally funded and can help low-income renters and homeowners pay for home heating costs and furnace repairs. Household income must be at 50% of the state median income to qualify for benefits.

To learn more about the EAP program or to apply visit the MN Dept. of Commerce Energy Assistance website at <https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/> for more details and to access the application portal. Or simply contact your county's EAP service provider.

If you are having difficulty paying your electric bill and regardless of whether you qualify for either of these programs, please contact Red River Valley Co-op Power to set up a payment plan.

## LOCAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

### **Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.**

1407 Erskine Street, Crookston, MN 56716  
(218) 281-9080 or (866) 264-3729  
(Norman County & W. Polk County)

### **West Central MN Community Action**

411 Industrial Park Blvd., Elbow Lake, MN 56531  
(800) 492-4805  
(Clay County Only)