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● DECEMBER 2024

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Defined electric service
areas protect rural Iowans**

**Smart insights about
smart appliances**

Holiday party recipes

Win a temperature-controlled smart mug ▶ See Page 3

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Allen Hollopeter, a T.I.P. member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

DEFINED ELECTRIC SERVICE AREAS PROTECT RURAL IOWANS

BY LESLIE KAUFMAN



At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), we are constantly monitoring issues that could impact the people and rural communities served by Iowa's electric cooperatives. Our state's 2025 Legislative Session will begin on Jan. 13, and IAEC will prioritize efforts to ensure Iowa's law regarding defined service areas is not undermined. I'd like to explain why this law has been so crucial to our mission to serve co-op member-consumers.

What are defined service areas?

In Iowa, your location determines which electric utility will serve you. This regulatory protection is called defined electric service territory, and the State of Iowa wrote Senate File 1258 into law almost 50 years ago to efficiently ensure that every square foot of our state has an electric utility obligated to provide service upon request.

Why do Iowa's electric cooperatives support defined service areas?

Electric co-ops are committed to safeguarding defined service areas because they protect rural Iowans by supporting affordable electric rates, fostering a resilient electric grid and encouraging economic development.

Defined service areas provide a high degree of certainty to Iowa's electric cooperatives, which allows us to confidently make long-term investments in power generation to maintain affordable rates, finance major grid upgrades to ensure resiliency and utilize new technologies to enhance service. Electric co-ops can also be proactive in maintenance and vegetation management to

improve reliability for the homes, farms and businesses we serve every day. Additionally, defined service areas allow electric co-ops to robustly support economic development efforts in the communities we serve, which retain and create local jobs and provide needed services and tax revenue.

Any efforts to remove or weaken Iowa's defined service areas could result in higher electric bills and decreased reliability for Iowans. This issue is non-negotiable for Iowa's not-for-profit electric cooperatives, which are mission-driven to power lives and empower communities by providing electricity that is safe, reliable and affordable.

Since the 1990s, several states have deregulated their electric utilities, but the hopes that competition would result in lower rates and improved

reliability have not materialized. In fact, according to a 2023 *New York Times* investigation, "Deregulation has resulted in increased rates/fees in every state where it has been introduced." The report goes on to conclude that "On average, residents living in a deregulated market pay \$40 more per month for electricity..." This outcome is unacceptable for the Iowans we serve.

We invite you to learn more about this issue at www.ProtectRuralIowa.com where you will also find links to research and studies on deregulation. Your locally owned electric cooperatives are working hard to safeguard defined service area protections that have benefited Iowans since 1976.

Leslie Kaufman is the executive vice president and general manager of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

Scan the QR code to learn more about why defined electric service territories are important to rural Iowans.



EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A TEMPERATURE-CONTROLLED SMART MUG!

Discover a smarter way to drink coffee! Experience the comfort of consistently hot coffee (or tea) at your chosen temperature. The Ember Mug 2 offers up to 80 minutes of heat (120 to 145 degrees F) or all-day warmth on its charging coaster. Ideal for keeping drinks at the perfect temperature, the mug wakes up when hot liquid is poured and goes to sleep based on motion detection. Features like auto sleep and memory ensure your drink is always at the right temperature.



ENTER ONLINE BY DEC. 31!

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Dec. 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the \$100 gift card to a local business from the October issue was **Daryl Geiken**, a **Grundy County REC** member-consumer.

LIHEAP APPLICATION PERIOD IS OPEN

The 2024-2025 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has been established to help qualifying low-income Iowa homeowners and renters pay for a portion of their primary heating costs for the winter heating season. The assistance is based on household income, household size, type of fuel and type of housing.

Besides meeting the income guidelines, you must furnish the Social Security numbers of all household members and a copy of recent heating and electric bills. You also must show proof of income for all household members age 18 and older. If you receive alimony or child support, it will need to be verified too.

If you're a wage earner, you should bring copies of your check stubs for the 30-day period before the date of application or a copy of your federal income tax return. If you're self-employed or a farmer, provide a copy of your most recent federal income tax return. And if you're on a fixed income – Social Security Benefits, Supplemental Security Income, Family Investment Program (FIP), Veterans Assistance, Unemployment Insurance and pensions – take copies of check stubs from the last 30 days. For FIP recipients, bring your current DHS Notice of Decision or contact your local office for acceptable document information.

In Iowa, applications for the program will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis from Nov. 1, 2024, through April 30, 2025. The start date is Oct. 1, 2024, for elderly (60 and over) and/or disabled applicants. If you're not sure where to apply, visit <https://bit.ly/2024-25liheap>. To contact your local community action agency, call 211 or write: LIHEAP, Iowa Department of Health & Human Services, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA 50319.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR 2025 MOMENTUM IS BUILDING CONFERENCE

Iowa's electric cooperatives invite building trades professionals to the 2025 Momentum is Building (MIB) conference, scheduled for Feb. 20-21, 2025, at the Sheraton West Des Moines. The annual conference aims to equip contractors and their staff with the knowledge and tools necessary to excel in a rapidly changing construction landscape.

A key attraction for attendees is earning continuing education credits (CEUs) in Iowa's plumbing/mechanical, HVAC and electrical codes. Attendees will also have the chance to network with industry peers, learn from leading experts in energy efficiency and the building trades, and gain insights into current energy efficiency regulations and incentives.

Sponsored by the Iowa Cooperatives for Energy Efficiency, the annual MIB conference links Iowa's construction industry with the services and resources provided by local electric cooperatives, which serve nearly 650,000 Iowans across all 99 counties.



Momentum is Building conference

Feb. 20-21, 2025
Sheraton West Des Moines

For more than 30 years, the MIB conference has created a platform for electric cooperatives and contractors to collaborate in providing rural Iowans with safe, efficient and cost-effective home comfort solutions.

For more information or to register, visit www.MomentumIsBuilding.com. Early bird registration runs until Jan. 20, 2025.

SUBMIT YOUR HOLIDAY PHOTOS

WIN \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

Submit your favorite holiday shots, and we might use it for next year's December magazine cover! If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100.

Submissions must high resolution and vertical images are preferred. To be considered, email photos to editor@ieclmagazine.com with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.

RURAL IOWA STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT CO-OPS, CAREERS AND ADVOCACY

In October, 55 rural Iowa high school students registered for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperative's (IAEC) third-annual Iowa Youth Leadership Academy (IYLA).

The 2025 Youth Tour will be held June 15-21, with an orientation the evening of June 15 in Des Moines.

Held during National Co-op Month, the three-part webinar series explored the cooperative business model, electric co-op careers and how to advocate for issues that impact rural Iowa.

Students who registered received a box of co-op goodies in the mail and one

lucky attendee was randomly selected to win a pair of Apple AirPods at the end of each live webinar. Students who attended all three webinars were

entered into a drawing for a \$1,000 scholarship.

"We were very pleased with the student interest and participation

in the program," says Iowa Youth Tour Coordinator Shelly York. "IYLA also helps us identify high schoolers across the state who might be interested in applying for the Youth Tour to D.C. in June."



SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Congratulations to Dominac Mills, a junior at St. Mary's Catholic School in Storm Lake, who was randomly selected as this year's Iowa Youth Leadership Academy's \$1,000 college scholarship.

TOP 10 HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

1 **Inspect electrical decorations for damage before use.** Cracked or damaged sockets, loose or bare wires, and loose connections may cause a serious shock or start a fire.

2 **Do not overload electrical outlets.** Overloaded electrical outlets and faulty wires are a common cause of holiday fires. Avoid overloading outlets and plug only one high-wattage into each outlet at a time.

3 **Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights.** More than three strands may not only blow a fuse but can also cause a fire.

4 **Keep trees fresh by watering daily.** Dry trees are a serious fire hazard.

5 **Use battery-operated candles.** Candles start almost half of home decoration fires according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

6 **Keep combustibles at least three feet from heat sources.** A heat source that was too close to the decoration was a factor in half of home fires that began with decorations, according to NFPA.

7 **Protect cords from damage.** To avoid shock or fire hazards, cords should never be pinched by furniture, forced into small spaces such as doors and windows, placed under rugs, located near heat sources or attached by nails or staples.

8 **Check decorations for certification label.** Decorations not bearing a label from an independent testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Intertek (ETL) have not been tested for safety and could be hazardous.

9 **Stay in the kitchen when something is cooking.** Unattended cooking equipment is the leading cause of home cooking fires.

10 **Turn off, unplug and extinguish all decorations when going to sleep or leaving the house.** Unattended candles are the cause of one in five home candle fires. Per NFPA, half of home fire deaths occur between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.



G&Ts ARE THE POWER BEHIND YOUR POWER

BY SCOTT FLOOD

Photo Source: Corn Belt Power Cooperative

You might be surprised to learn that your local electric cooperative doesn't generate the electricity you use in your home or business. In most cases, your co-op does not own a power plant but instead purchases electricity from an outside source and then routes the power to your community.

For more than 800 electric cooperatives across the country, the source of electricity is a different kind of cooperative. Referred to as G&Ts, these generation and transmission cooperatives exist to help electric co-ops serve their members as reliably and affordably as possible. Their only members are local electric co-ops, so G&Ts are actually cooperatives that serve – you guessed it – cooperatives.

Providing at-cost power

Across the nation, 64 G&T cooperatives provide access to wholesale (at-cost) power at a better

price than each of their member co-ops could obtain on their own. Most G&Ts go beyond the delivery of power to provide sophisticated business resources that would typically be out of reach for local co-ops.

Like your local co-op, G&Ts are not-for-profit organizations that exist to serve the needs of their members. G&Ts generally serve all the co-ops in a specific geographic area.

In Iowa, electric co-ops are members of various G&T cooperatives (see map, top of Page 7). These G&Ts generate electricity at multiple sites using a diverse mix of fuels such as coal, natural gas, wind, solar, hydro and landfill gas.

G&Ts employ a leadership team of experts in data, finance, engineering, economic development, environmental management and other important specialties essential

for electric co-ops. The G&T operates behind the scenes to support the local co-op's teams, and although G&Ts may be largely unseen, they operate with complete transparency.

G&Ts are best known as the source for at-cost electricity that is generated elsewhere, then delivered to your local co-op over high-voltage transmission lines. Your co-op uses distribution power lines and transformers to then deliver that electricity to your home or business.

Most G&Ts maintain their own power plants, while others purchase power for their members on the wholesale market. Some G&Ts manage a combination of native power generation and purchases. Because a G&T buys enough power to supply all its member co-ops, it has the bargaining power to secure significantly lower prices than those co-ops could negotiate by themselves. Regardless of how

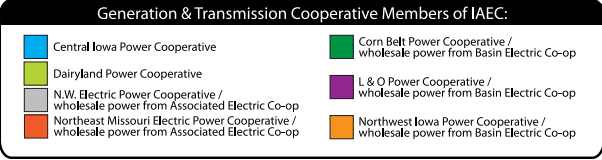
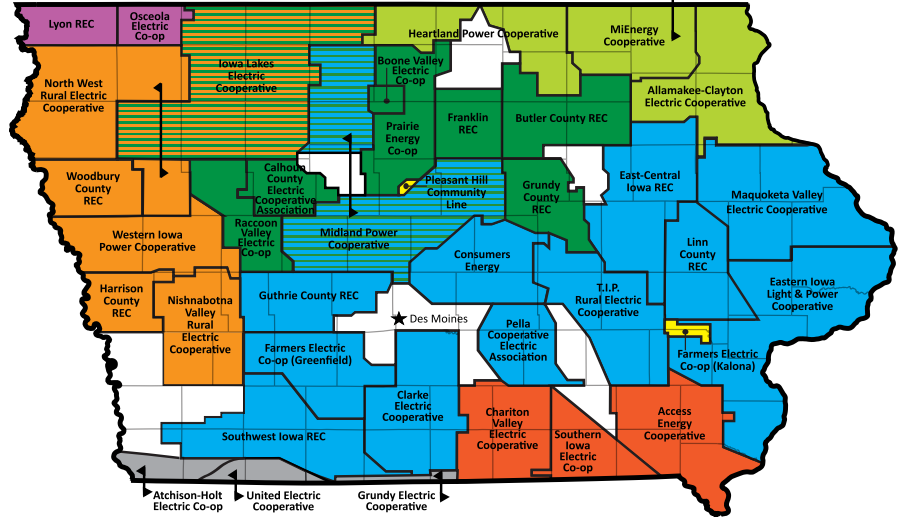
they're structured, G&Ts help keep your electric bill smaller.

Energy reliability is paramount

Just as important is the work G&Ts perform in planning. The nation's energy landscape is changing rapidly. G&Ts constantly work with local co-op staff to study and forecast power needs. They consider how growing communities might affect the demand for electricity in the future and work closely with local co-ops when power reliability is challenged, such as times when electricity demand outpaces supply or after a major weather event.

In addition to obtaining the electricity local co-ops need, G&Ts improve and maintain the reliability of the infrastructure co-ops and their communities depend upon. By working with local co-op staff to upgrade transmission lines and deploy substations, they make sure the power will be there for members like you when you need it. G&Ts also work closely with government agencies that monitor and manage the nation's electric grid.

Electric Distribution Cooperative Members of IAEC:



So, while your co-op may not own the power plant that generates the electricity you use every day, it's part of an even bigger not-for-profit cooperative whose mission is to make your service even more reliable and

affordable. As the power behind your power, just like your electric co-op, G&T cooperatives exist to serve you.

Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



G&Ts employ a leadership team of experts across many career fields. Photo Sources: Central Iowa Power Cooperative, Corn Belt Power Cooperative and Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative.

Holiday

PARTY
RECIPES



WHITE HOT CHOCOLATE

- 3 cups half and half, divided
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup white chocolate chips
- 1 3-inch cinnamon stick
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- whipped cream, for garnish
- cinnamon, for garnish

Combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup half and half, white chocolate chips, cinnamon stick and nutmeg. Stir over low heat until chips are melted. Discard cinnamon, add remaining half and half and stir until hot. Remove from heat and add vanilla. Pour into three or four mugs and garnish each with whipped cream and cinnamon.

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

EASY PARTY CHEESECAKE

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 1 can Eagle brand milk (sweetened condensed milk)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 9-inch graham cracker crust

Mix cream cheese and milk until smooth. Add lemon juice and vanilla. Mix, then pour into the graham cracker crust. Refrigerate 2 hours or overnight. *Serves 8*

Kary Blunk • Russell
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

BAKED PARMESAN CRISPS

- 1 cup Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- optional toppings: garlic powder, paprika

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Put heaping teaspoons of Parmesan cheese on paper, spreading them to make neat circles about 2 inches in diameter. Sprinkle with optional toppings to taste. Bake at 400 degrees F for 5 minutes. Remove and let cool. The cheese makes a lacey disc, almost like a snowflake. Best served the day you make them. *Serves 12*

Patsy Vander Schaaf • Sheldon
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

CARAMEL MACCHIATO

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup instant coffee
- hot water
- 5 ounces caramel sauce
- 3 ounces vanilla syrup
- $6\frac{1}{4}$ cups milk
- whipped topping
- caramel drizzle

Dissolve coffee in a little bit of hot water. Meanwhile, froth caramel sauce, vanilla syrup and milk in a saucepan. Heat to 150 degrees F. Combine coffee with frothed ingredients. Serve with whipped topping and caramel drizzle. *Serves 6-8*

Clark DeSmet • Alvord
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

HOLIDAY SPREAD

- 1 package raw cranberries, chopped
- 1 bunch cilantro, chopped
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped
- 1-2 jalapeños, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 package cream cheese crackers or chips

Combine cranberries, cilantro, onions, jalapenos, sugar, cumin and lemon juice. Refrigerate overnight or at least 4 hours. Spread cream cheese on a tray or plate and cover with cranberry mixture. Serve with crackers or chips.

Hana Hartter • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

SPINACH TORTILLA ROLL-UPS

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 4 large spinach burrito tortillas
- ¾ cup raisins
- 3 tablespoons chives or green onions, chopped
- 12 ounces deli turkey slices
- 8 ounces Havarti cheese
- romaine lettuce, ribs removed

Spread cream cheese on tortillas. Layer remaining ingredients in the order listed, avoiding spreading layers all the way to the top as they will slide when you roll them. Roll tightly from bottom to top. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight or several hours. Cut into 1-inch slices and serve on plate or platter. These can also be made with deli ham and Swiss cheese. *Serves 10-12*

Sandra Lacey • Danbury
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

SALMON LOG

- 1 16-ounce can salmon
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons onion, grated
- 1 teaspoon horseradish
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon liquid smoke
- ½ cup pecans, chopped
- 3 tablespoons parsley, snipped
- crackers

Drain and flake salmon. Combine salmon with cream cheese, lemon juice, onion, horseradish, salt and liquid smoke. Mix well and chill for several hours. Combine pecans and parsley, set aside. Shape salmon mixture into log and roll into parsley pecan mixture. Chill well. Serve with crackers. *Serves 6-8*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

CRAB-IN-A-ROUND

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 5-ounce jar Old English cheese spread
- ½ teaspoon seasoned salt
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 6-ounce can crab meat, drained
- 1 package English muffins
- canned mushrooms, chopped
- parsley flakes

Combine softened butter and cheese spread, mix well. Add seasoned salt, garlic powder and mayonnaise. Add crab meat and mix well. Split English muffins into halves, add crab mixture and top with chopped mushrooms and garnish with parsley flakes. Bake at 400 degrees F for 10-15 minutes, until golden brown and bubbly. Cut into four pie-shaped pieces and serve with a toothpick in each wedge for a quick appetizer. *Serves 24*

Karen Segriff • Brooklyn
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

WANTED:

RECIPES WITH AN INTERNATIONAL FLAIR

THE REWARD:
\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Dec. 31

Submit your **favorite international-inspired recipes**. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



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(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes
Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322

POWERING LIVES EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Editor's Note: This article is Part 1 of a two-part series showcasing the impact of Iowa's electric cooperatives throughout all the state's 99 counties.

Iowa's electric cooperatives are proud to be member-owned, serving our communities with a steadfast commitment to safe, reliable, affordable, and sustainable power for over 85 years.

Covering more than two-thirds of Iowa's land area, our cooperatives maintain close to 62,000 miles of power lines – enough to circle the globe two and a half times! We deliver power to nearly 240,000 households, farms and businesses, reaching approximately 650,000 Iowans across every county.

Primarily serving rural areas, we are mission-driven to enhance the quality of life for our member-owners and are guided by seven core principles that define all cooperatives.

Iowa's electric co-ops serve **80%** of Iowa's land mass and maintain enough power lines to wrap around the equator **2.5X** (That's around 62,000 miles!)



Owned and governed by the members we serve, not-for-profit electric cooperatives power the lives of

650,000 IOWANS throughout all 99 counties.



Electric cooperatives directly support almost

2,000 JOBS IN IOWA



Empowering communities

For over eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have made significant contributions to the local communities we serve by creating stable jobs, paying taxes, returning surplus funds to members and investing in student programs.

Iowa's electric cooperatives directly support nearly 2,000 full-time jobs, providing Iowans with steady careers, competitive wages and benefits in a dynamic industry. Many co-op employees are rooted in small-town communities where they actively participate in local events and initiatives.

Collectively, Iowa's electric cooperatives contribute almost \$29 million annually in local and state taxes. These funds support essential services, including emergency

response, road maintenance, healthcare and public schools.

Being member-owned means electric co-ops build equity for members based on individual electric use, and surplus funds are returned to them over time.

The surplus capital is returned to members over time when local boards determine it is financially feasible. To date, Iowans have received more than \$300 million in retired capital credits from their electric cooperatives.

We are also deeply invested in Iowa's future, supporting various educational and leadership development programs for students. Over the past 65 years, Iowa's cooperatives have sent more than 2,500 high school students to Washington, D.C., for the annual Youth Tour, where students gain insights into citizenship and the cooperative business model. Co-ops further support students with college scholarships and internships.

Economic engines of progress

Electric cooperatives do more than just provide power; we also invest heavily in economic development efforts throughout rural Iowa.

From 2018 to 2022, Iowa's electric cooperatives invested \$4.7 billion in economic development projects, supporting more than 7,300 jobs, both retained and created, across the state.

In that period, our cooperatives generated \$688 million in wages and salaries and produced \$232 million in self-employment income.

Iowa's cooperatives have a long history of partnership with the

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development and USDA's Rural Utilities Service, proudly serving as intermediaries for revolving loan funds and other programs. Several Iowa co-ops have also developed industrial speculative buildings to foster local business growth and attract new enterprises to rural communities.

Electric cooperatives are equally proud to work with the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) to bolster rural economic development. Established nearly 40 years ago, IADG provides crucial support for business and community projects on behalf of more than 150 Iowa

electric and telecommunications utilities. IADG has facilitated over 2,550 projects, creating or retaining at least 62,000 jobs statewide.

Investing in economic development is one of the key ways Iowa's electric cooperatives proudly contribute to the vitality of our communities.

Learn more at www.iowarec.org/who-we-are/economic-progress.

Part 2 of this feature will appear in the January 2025 issue of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living and focus on the impact of electric cooperatives in providing reliable and affordable power.



For the five years ending in 2022, Iowa electric co-ops had an impressive impact of

\$4.7 BILLION

 IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

These investments supported more than

7,300 JOBS



(retained, attracted or expanded) DURING THAT SAME TIME PERIOD.

BE AN ENERGY STAR

BY JENNAH DENNEY

With the holiday season upon us and the days growing colder, you may be considering ways to stay cozy while also managing home energy use.

One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is by choosing products with the ENERGY STAR® label. But what exactly does that label mean, and how can it benefit you?

How products earn the ENERGY STAR label

ENERGY STAR is a program by the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help consumers identify energy-efficient products that save money and reduce environmental impact.

Products that earn the ENERGY STAR label must meet strict guidelines for energy efficiency, performance and cost-effectiveness. Here's how the process works:

- 1 The product must be more energy efficient than typical models. This helps you save on energy bills by using less electricity while still providing the same performance.
- 2 The product must be tested in EPA-recognized labs, following standardized procedures. These tests ensure the product meets all energy efficiency and performance requirements.
- 3 Once tested, a third-party certification body reviews the product's data to verify it meets the set standards. This ensures that only the best products receive the ENERGY STAR label.

Even after a product is certified, the EPA conducts "off-the-shelf" testing on random samples of ENERGY STAR products to ensure they continue to meet the required standards. If a product fails to meet the performance requirements during verification



One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is by choosing products with the ENERGY STAR® label.

Photo Source: ENERGY STAR



Many large appliances include a yellow Energy Guide label that provides estimated energy use. Comparing these labels can help you determine how much you'll save with an ENERGY STAR model compared to a standard model.

testing, it can be disqualified from the ENERGY STAR program. The EPA has clear procedures for handling such disqualifications to maintain the integrity of the label.

Speaking of labels

Whether you're upgrading your refrigerator, replacing light bulbs or purchasing new electronics, the blue ENERGY STAR label is your assurance that the product has passed all energy efficiency tests. It's easy to spot and can be found on products ranging from small and major appliances to electronics.

Many large appliances, such as washing machines and clothes dryers, include a yellow Energy Guide label that provides estimated energy use. Comparing these labels can help you determine how much you'll save with an ENERGY STAR model compared to a standard model.

While ENERGY STAR products can cost a little more upfront, their energy savings over time will often cover the difference. They help reduce your household

energy consumption, which could translate to lower utility bills.

Why it matters

As a member of an electric cooperative, choosing energy-efficient products benefits not only you but also our entire community. When co-op members use less energy, it lowers overall electricity demand, helping to stabilize rates and reduce costs for everyone.

As you shop for appliances, electronics or other home equipment this holiday season, look for the ENERGY STAR label. Whether it's a new washing machine or energy-efficient lighting options, these products are a simple and effective way to save money and lower energy use. Check with your local electric co-op to see if they offer rebates or incentives for purchasing ENERGY STAR products.

To browse products that have earned the ENERGY STAR label, visit www.energystar.gov.

Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

SIMPLE WAYS TO SAVE IN THE KITCHEN

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

The holiday season brings opportunities to enjoy meals with friends and family, leading to spending more time in the kitchen. Whether hosting a few or a crowd, consider making new energy efficiency traditions this year with these tips to manage your energy use.

Consider using smaller appliances vs. the oven

Let's start with cooking your meal. Your electric oven is typically the highest-wattage appliance in the kitchen. Yet, people usually don't turn their ovens on for long periods. Assuming an average oven wattage of 3,000 and an average cost of \$.16 per kilowatt-hour, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, it costs \$.48 an hour. Let's say you use your oven for four hours to make a special meal. That's less than \$2 of electricity. While that may not seem like a big deal now, operating your oven for four hours daily is \$700 a year.

Using smaller appliances instead of your oven can help you save. A slow cooker uses between 100 and 450 watts, which is significantly less than an electric oven at 2,000 to 5,000 watts. That means you can use a slow cooker for longer and still use less energy.

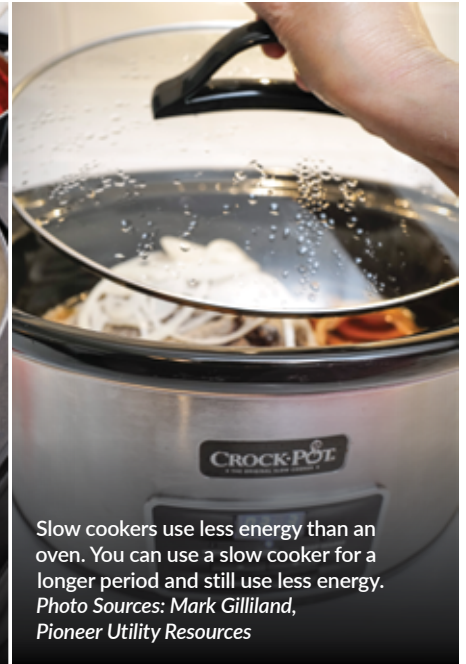
Opt for your microwave or toaster oven to reheat or cook smaller items. The microwave uses significantly less energy than the oven. A toaster oven uses about half the energy of a conventional oven, according to ENERGY STAR®.

You should never turn on your oven and leave the door open to heat your home.

This can break your oven and be a safety hazard, especially with gas ovens that can cause carbon monoxide buildup.



Before cooking on your stovetop, clean the burners to ensure the appliance heats evenly, which can help you save energy. Match pots to appropriately sized burners to avoid wasting energy.



Slow cookers use less energy than an oven. You can use a slow cooker for a longer period and still use less energy. Photo Sources: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources

Use the stovetop wisely

When cooking on the stovetop, match the pot or pan size to the burner. Lids help your pots retain heat, which cooks food faster and wastes less heat. Keep your stovetop clean to ensure the appliance heats evenly.

If you want to upgrade your stovetop, consider switching to an induction cooktop. It uses an electromagnetic field below the surface to heat pots and pans directly. This provides more precise heat, faster cook times and higher efficiency. It can also improve the air quality in your home when compared to a gas cooktop.

Find refrigerator and freezer savings

Next, let's look for refrigerator savings. The gaskets on your refrigerator doors should make a tight seal to keep in cold air. Make sure you clean and maintain them or replace them if necessary. Keep frost from building up in the freezer, which can decrease efficiency and

make your freezer work harder to maintain a balanced temperature.

Wait until food cools before putting leftovers in the fridge. Putting hot food in the refrigerator results in more energy used to cool it down. Aim for about 30 minutes of cool time. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, perishable food should be refrigerated within two hours after it is cooked.

Setting your refrigerator colder than needed wastes energy. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends 37 degrees F for the refrigerator and 0 degrees F for the freezer. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature.

Whatever you choose to cook or how you cook it, keep in mind these simple tips to make your kitchen more efficient and save energy this holiday season.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

SMART INSIGHTS ABOUT BUYING SMART APPLIANCES

BY SCOTT FLOOD

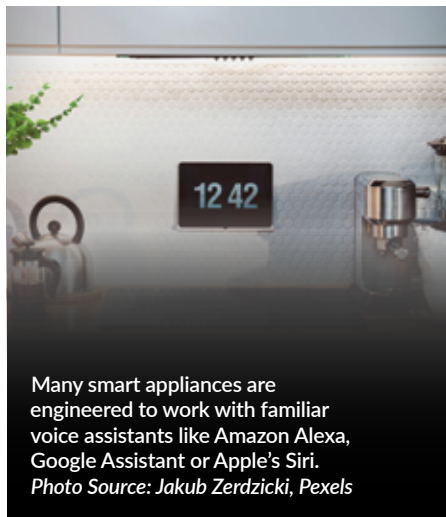
Santa isn't the only one who makes an appearance as the year nears its end. Retailers start trumpeting deep discounts on home appliances. That's great if you've considered replacing some of your home's appliances with one of today's "smart" models. Before deciding to buy a smart appliance, take some time to get smarter about what they offer – and what you really need.

Start with an assessment

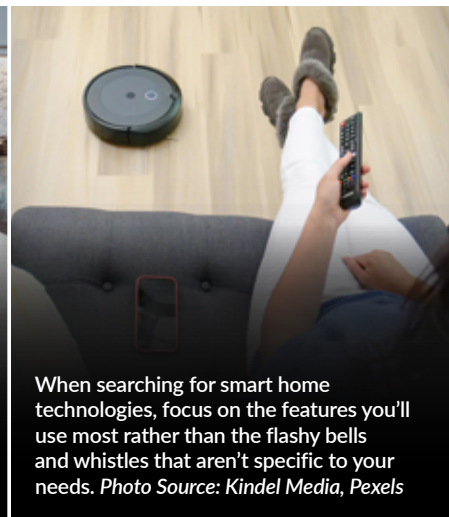
Begin with an honest look at how you live and consider the role your current appliances play in your daily routine. Would the capabilities of a smart appliance make your life easier? For example, if you frequently forget to start the laundry or your dishwasher, Wi-Fi-enabled appliances with remote start capabilities may save you time and trouble. But if you're thinking about stepping up to a smart appliance because it has a cool feature you might use once a year, ask yourself if it's worth the extra cost.

Next, think about any smart devices you already use in your home. Make sure they're compatible with the smart appliance's operating system so you can get all the benefits you expect. For example, many of these appliances are engineered to work with familiar voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Apple's Siri. Incompatible systems might limit your ability to use the features that are most important to you.

Is your home's infrastructure ready to handle the demands of a smart appliance? Depending upon the model you choose, it might require anything from a basic internet connection to a home Wi-Fi network to provide the operation you expect. Some smart appliances may require Bluetooth, Zigbee, Z-Wave or other systems for connectivity. Having access to the right technology



Many smart appliances are engineered to work with familiar voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Apple's Siri. Photo Source: Jakub Zerdzicki, Pexels



When searching for smart home technologies, focus on the features you'll use most rather than the flashy bells and whistles that aren't specific to your needs. Photo Source: Kindel Media, Pexels

ensures your system will function correctly and be able to handle updates as they become available.

Consider energy efficiency and other factors

It's always important to consider energy efficiency when purchasing a new appliance. Most smart appliances are designed to reduce energy consumption, with operating modes that deliver the performance you want while making more efficient use of energy. Smart appliances that are ENERGY STAR®-certified meet or exceed federal energy efficiency standards and some may use only half as much energy as standard appliances.

Repairs to smart appliances can be expensive, so consider the warranty. Generous manufacturer warranties demonstrate the company's confidence in the quality of its products.

For most homeowners, the biggest downside to smart appliances is that they carry a higher price tag than their not-so-smart counterparts. However, price is just one factor in the cost of any appliance. When you

also consider the long-term value smart appliances deliver – whether in energy savings, helpful conveniences or improved reliability – most will save you money over their service life. In addition, smart appliances may be eligible for rebates and tax incentives, so ask your retailer what's available.

What's ahead for smart appliances in the foreseeable future? The marketplace is starting to see the integration of basic artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities that can make smart appliances provide better service, greater reliability and lower energy needs. As these AI-fueled systems become more common, your refrigerator might know your habits so well that it can generate a shopping list for you. Your dishwasher could adjust its operating cycle to better clean your family's uniquely dirty dishes.

There was a time when appliances changed little from decade to decade. Today, products advance more quickly than ever before, and we can expect to see more big changes ahead.

Scott Flood writes on energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

'TIS THE SEASON FOR TRADITIONS

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

We've officially entered the season of traditions. Can you recall a holiday tradition your family had when you were younger? What holiday traditions do you still enjoy today?

For me, these included homemade chili for supper and opening gifts on Christmas Eve. Baking Christmas cookies. Attending services at the country church in Webster County where generations of my mom's family worshipped.

It's always fun to hear about other families' traditions, as well. When I was visiting my second cousin Barb at her home near Coggon last winter, she mentioned the Hamilton Family Cook Off.

This family tradition (inspired by the "Iron Chef" cooking competition on the Food Network) started in 2006 with an M&Ms Challenge. The rules were simple. Any Hamilton family member (or date of a family member) could enter. Contestants just had to include M&Ms in their recipes. Everyone voted on their favorite dish when the family gathered for the Christmas holidays. (The winning entry was a cheesecake with M&Ms.)

This friendly competition was such a hit that it has endured. Each year, the featured ingredient is announced around Thanksgiving. Options have included cheese, apples, cranberries, beer, cinnamon, olives, bacon, peanut butter, ginger, chipotle peppers, oranges, corn, maple, lemon and honey.

After the judging is complete, the year's winner receives a traveling trophy (a kitschy, chef-themed ceramic pig), plus the winner gets to choose the "secret ingredient" for next year's Hamilton Family Cook Off.

Decoding the power of traditions

This got me thinking about how traditions can enrich our lives. They are the glue that holds families,

communities and even countries together. They can be as diverse as a summer family vacation, tailgating at college football games each fall or celebrating America's independence on the Fourth of July.

Traditions hold the power to shape human history. "Tradition" comes from a Latin word that means "to hand over, to transmit." Psychologists tell us that traditions are important to our mental health since they strengthen shared values and provide a sense of stability.

Passing traditions from generation to generation also preserves our heritage and helps us reconnect with our roots. The results can be especially profound for children.

I'm fascinated by research conducted by Marshall Duke, a clinical psychologist and faculty member at Emory University in Atlanta. His studies have shown that the more children know about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives and the higher their self-esteem. These children prove to be more resilient and can cope more effectively with the stresses of life.

Time won't wait

This lesson in resilience is something I need to remember. With my busy schedule, I've gotten away from some family traditions, like decorating homemade sugar cookies in the weeks leading up to Christmas and sending holiday cards.

Did all that busyness enrich my life? Not really. I can hardly remember what was so important that I

sacrificed some family traditions to slog through a never-ending to-do list.

The longer I live, the more I'm reminded that time won't wait. The country church where we used to gather for the Christmas service closed permanently in 2010. Some of my loved ones have passed away. Yet, I still cherish the traditions we shared and the priceless memories we created together.

During this holiday season and the year ahead, let's all make more time to enjoy the traditions that keep us connected. Maybe even create a new tradition. It's never too late to start something good.

If you have beloved traditions in your life, I'd love to hear about them. Email me at yettergirl@yahoo.com.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.



This pig is a traveling trophy for the Hamilton family's holiday cooking competition.

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