

# PIONEER



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The Pioneer Newsletter is the official Cooperative publication.  
Meeker Energy is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## MEEKER ENERGY POWERS UP HORSE BARN RENOVATION AT COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

*For decades, the Meeker County Fair has been a highlight of summer, drawing families, neighbors, and visitors together to celebrate agriculture, education, and community pride. From livestock shows to 4-H exhibits, the fair provides opportunities for youth to learn and lead while giving the community a reason to gather year after year.*

In 2025, fairgoers noticed a big change at one of the fair's facilities. The horse barn, originally built in 1966, received a major facelift that addressed long-standing potential safety issues while also improving the experience for both exhibitors and visitors. The project was made possible through the combined

efforts of the Meeker County Agricultural Society, local donors, 4-H families, and Meeker Energy working together through the Sharing Success matching grant program offered by CoBank.

The Agricultural Society had identified the barn as a top priority, securing an agriculture grant to replace the aging siding while private donors contributed funds for a new ventilation system.

Meeker Energy stepped forward to sponsor a critical piece of the renovation: a complete overhaul of the electrical system.

*Continued on page 2.*

## HORSE BARN CONTINUED...



Many parts of the barn still relied on the original wiring, creating potential fire hazards and limiting the use of modern equipment. “County fairs bring people together and give youth a platform to learn, lead, and share their work,” said Meeker Energy’s Executive Coordinator, Mary Alice Holm. “When we saw the need at the horse barn, it felt like the right fit for our first Sharing Success project outside the Cooperative. It supports a wide range of people in our community while improving safety for animals and visitors.”

### MEMBERS HAVE A CHOICE: HEATING AND COOLING PROGRAMS PUT YOU IN CONTROL

***One of the biggest advantages of being a Meeker Energy member is having choices that help lower your energy costs. Through our energy management programs, you can take control of how you heat and cool your home while paying significantly less for the electricity you use. By shifting electric use away from the highest-demand times, you lock in lower rates, cut your monthly bills, and support a more reliable system for all members.***

These programs are built around one key idea: comfort shouldn’t come at a high price. 25-33-133 Whether you use electricity and a backup fuel source, prefer an all-electric system, or need affordable cooling in the summer, Meeker Energy has options that keep costs under control. Every participant receives reduced off-peak rates (5.7¢/kWh September–May and 6.2¢/kWh in summer) along with rebates to make upgrading easier. With heating season around the corner, two programs stand out for both savings and comfort: Dual Fuel Heating and Electric Thermal Storage (ETS) Heating.

Through the program, Meeker Energy contributed \$6,000, which was matched by CoBank for a total of \$12,000 toward the project. This funding allowed the barn to be fully rewired with safer, more efficient service, and to be outfitted with bright LED lighting and a new ventilation system. Exhibitors no longer need to rely on individual fans plugged into extension cords, and the cooler, better-lit space provides a safer environment for horses, owners, and guests.

The improvements were unveiled at the 2025 Meeker County Fair, earning enthusiastic praise from 4-H families and fair visitors. Exhibitors shared that the upgrades help them take greater pride in their projects, knowing they can showcase their animals in a clean, bright, and safe space.

The impact reaches beyond the annual fair as well. In recent years, the fairgrounds have hosted occasional horse shows, but with the upgraded facilities, additional events are already being planned. 29-10-304 A barrel racing event sponsored by Cowgirl Tuff Company is set for this fall as a fundraiser for the 4-H horse project and riding arena updates. Fair organizers hope to see even more shows and activities in the future, bringing visitors to the fairgrounds throughout the year.



#### DUAL FUEL HEATING

Dual Fuel offers members one of the lowest-cost ways to heat their homes. Most of the time, your 240V electric heating system does all the work at the reduced rate. During peak demand, the system automatically switches to your backup fuel source, protecting you from higher costs while still keeping your home warm. New participants may also qualify for a rebate of \$25 per kW of connected load, helping offset installation expenses.

#### ELECTRIC THERMAL STORAGE HEATING

For members who want the convenience of all-electric heating, ETS delivers comfort at a controlled cost. The system charges during off-peak hours when electricity is cheapest, storing heat in ceramic bricks and releasing it steadily throughout the day. That means no fuel deliveries, no price swings, and dependable warmth at the lowest available rate.

#### YOUR ENERGY, YOUR CHOICE

Meeker Energy’s energy management programs give you the power to manage your comfort and your budget. Learn more or enroll today at [www.meeker.coop/programs](http://www.meeker.coop/programs)





# UNDERSTANDING THE PRESSURES BEHIND RISING ENERGY COSTS

***Across the country, the cost of providing electricity continues to rise and not just here at Meeker Energy. From generation to delivery, electric cooperatives like ours are experiencing cost increases from every angle, particularly from our wholesale power providers.***

These providers are responsible for generating the electricity we deliver to your homes, farms, and businesses. And right now, they're facing an environment where everything from building materials to regulatory requirements is more expensive than it was just a few years ago.

One key factor is the need for new infrastructure. To meet growing demand and replace aging systems, our wholesale providers are investing in new power plants, high-voltage transmission lines, and system upgrades. These aren't small, short-term projects; they're large-scale, multi-year efforts that require significant capital and planning. As a result, the cost of building and maintaining the grid is increasing dramatically.

The price of essential materials has also spiked. Since 2020, the cost of transformers, critical for distributing electricity, has risen by 70 to 100 percent. Wire and conductor materials are up 30 to 50 percent, and components like relays, breakers, and smart meters have all seen double-digit increases. These are the core building blocks of our electric system, and they're more difficult and expensive to source than ever before.

At the same time, regulatory standards around grid reliability have tightened. Utilities must now carry larger reserves of generation capacity to ensure power is available during extreme weather or high-demand events. That means additional investments, whether purchasing capacity on the market or building it directly.

One of the largest contributors to these rising generation costs is the growing demand for natural gas. While renewables like wind and solar are an important part of the mix, natural gas remains essential for backup and peak-time generation. As overall electricity usage grows, especially with the rise of electric vehicles, data centers, and large manufacturing loads, natural gas demand is increasing, and prices are projected to follow. This directly impacts the cost to produce wholesale electricity, especially during high-demand seasons.

These cost drivers are beyond any one utility's control, but they have very real

effects on how we plan for the future. At Meeker Energy, we're continuing to monitor these trends, advocate for a stair step approach to wholesale rate increases and find local efficiencies to help reduce long-term impacts on our members.

We appreciate your continued trust as we work to balance affordability, reliability, and responsible planning, today and for the years ahead.

***Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,***

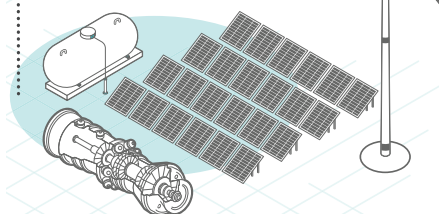
**Luke Johnson**  
CEO, Meeker Energy

## INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS

Here's a look at the national average percent increase since 2020:

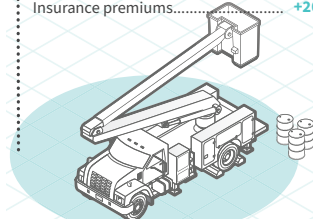
### ● Generation

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

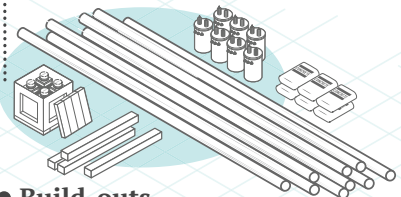
Light trucks.....	+25-40%
Bucket trucks, digger derricks.....	+20-50%
Fuel costs (especially diesel).....	+20-30%
Maintenance.....	+15-25%
Insurance premiums.....	+20%



Over the past five years, the electric utilities have faced soaring demand, supply chain delays, material shortages, higher labor costs, and tariffs. These pressures have driven up the cost of producing power, stretched project timelines, and increased financing needs, ultimately raising rates.

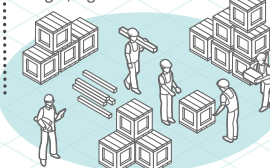
### ● Infrastructure

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%



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

# MEMBER NOTICE: MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE



The Cold Weather Rule, Section 216B.097 of the Public Utilities Act, in effect from October 1 through April 30 in Minnesota, governs how we handle disconnects; it does not prohibit them. Electric cooperatives cannot disconnect a residential consumer for nonpayment if the disconnection would affect the primary heat source, **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. You declare the inability to pay by completing the Inability to Pay Form. Household income must include proof of one-month gross total household income or be verified on a form provided either by Meeker Energy or by a local energy assistance provider.
2. Your household income is at or below 50% of the state median household income and/or you are a recipient of energy assistance for this heating season.
3. You must have entered into a payment agreement and remain current under that agreement.

We want to ensure that you are well-informed about your energy payments and the protection offered by the Cold Weather Rule during the winter months. 02-32-302 It's essential to be aware that Meeker Energy will be conducting disconnects as per legal requirements, even during the cold weather period.

To ensure transparency and assist you in navigating this process, Meeker Energy will provide the following information:

**Advance Notice of Disconnection:** You will receive a notice of disconnection at least 30 days before any action is taken.

**Member Rights and Responsibilities Statement:** A document outlining your rights and responsibilities as a member will be provided to you.

**Local Energy Assistance Providers:** You will be given a list of local energy assistance providers who can offer support in times of financial difficulty.

**Cold Weather Rule Protection Request Forms:** Forms enabling you to request protection will be available.

**Payment Plan Options and Alternatives:** Information about available payment plans and alternative options to maintain uninterrupted service will be presented.

It is crucial for you to take proactive steps to avoid disconnection. We strongly encourage you to act promptly. The sooner you reach out to us, the better your chances of retaining electricity service throughout the winter season.

Should you require assistance or wish to discuss options for shut-off protection or payment arrangements, please do not hesitate to contact us at 320-693-3231. You can also access the Cold Weather Rule & Shut-Off Protection form on our website's download forms page: [meeker.coop/download-forms](http://meeker.coop/download-forms).

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS FIND LOCAL HELP WITH HEATING & UTILITY COSTS

### KANDIYOHI, MCLEOD & MEEKER COUNTIES

#### UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

P.O. Box 1359, 200 4th Street SW, Willmar, MN 56201  
320-235-0850 | 800-992-1710

904 Hwy 15 S, Hutchinson, MN 55350  
320-587-5244 | 800-992-1710

120 N. Sibley Avenue, Litchfield, MN 55355  
320-693-7911 | 800-992-1710

### MCLEOD COUNTY AREA

#### MCLEOD COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICE CENTER

1805 Ford Avenue N, Glencoe, MN 55336  
320-864-3144 | 320-484-4330 | 800-247-1756

### RENVILLE COUNTY AREA

#### UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

500 E DePue Avenue, Olivia, MN 56277  
320-523-1842 | 800-363-2533

### WRIGHT COUNTY AREA

#### WRIGHT COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION

130 West Division Street, Maple Lake, MN 55358  
320-963-6500

### STEARNS COUNTY AREA

#### STEARNS TRI-COUNTY ACTION PROGRAMS

1210 23rd Avenue S, P.O. Box 683, Waite Park, MN 56387  
320-251-1612 | 888-765-5597



Four location numbers are hidden within this Pioneer. If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Energy before September 30, you will have \$10 credit to your account. When you call and verify your information is correct in our system, you will also receive an additional bill credit equal to one month's output from a Member Solar Panel.

# MEMBERS HELP DISTRIBUTE \$16,341 TO LOCAL CAUSES

Meeker Energy members and VIBRANT subscribers came together once again to make a difference close to home. Through Operation Round Up®, the Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board recently approved \$16,341 in grants to support local organizations working to strengthen our communities.

Operation Round Up® makes it simple for members to give back. By rounding up their monthly electric or broadband bills to the nearest dollar, participants turn pocket change into powerful change. When added together, those small monthly contributions provide meaningful support to area nonprofits, schools, and community programs.

“Every time our members round up, they’re helping local organizations,” said Trust Chair Laura Niece. “It might not seem like much, but all those nickels and dimes add up to make a real difference in our communities”

As a not-for-profit, member-owned cooperative, Meeker Energy is committed to improving the quality of life in the communities it serves. Operation Round Up® is one way that commitment comes to life, channeling generosity directly into the hands of organizations doing important work right here at home.

The Trust Board meets three times each year to review applications and award funding. The final deadline for 2025 grant applications is November 6, with details and forms available at [www.meeker.coop](http://www.meeker.coop).

## AUGUST 2025 RECIPIENT LIST

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

Advocates 4 Health .....	\$1,000
Cemetery Association, Lamson .....	\$400
Community Market, Litchfield .....	\$150
Fire Department, Eden Valley .....	\$1,000
Lutheran Social Services .....	\$2,000
Powder Ridge Ski Patrol .....	\$2,000
Rescue Squad, Litchfield .....	\$1,500
True Friends and Friendship Ventures .....	\$1,500

### EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Litchfield Area Mentorship Program - Kinship .....	\$1,000
SWWC Foundation for Innovation in Education .....	\$1,000

### K-12 TEACHERS WORKING COOPERATIVELY WITH OTHER GRANTS

Dassel-Cokato Middle School .....	\$300
Kimball Elementary School .....	\$299
Lake Ripley Elementary School .....	\$697
Lake Ripley Elementary School .....	\$1,160
Litchfield Middle School .....	\$2,335

### TOTAL

**\$16,341**



**LEARN MORE ABOUT OPERATION ROUND UP AT:**  
[www.meeker.coop/operationroundup](http://www.meeker.coop/operationroundup)



**WILLIE WIREDHAND'S  
ELECTRICITY FUN FACT**

Electrostatic precipitators use static electricity to capture and remove fine particles such as dust, smoke, and soot from industrial exhaust gases before they reach the atmosphere. By charging the particles and collecting them on oppositely charged plates, these systems significantly reduce air pollution and improve overall air quality.

## MEMBER NEWS

### ENERGY MANAGEMENT RATE REMINDER

Non-summer rates go into effect on September 1, 2025. The energy management rate will return to the fall/winter rate of 5.7¢/kWh and remain in place until May 31, 2026. Your September usage will be reflected on your October bill. For more information on Meeker Energy electric rates visit [www.meeker.coop/rates](http://www.meeker.coop/rates) or contact us at 320-693-3231.

### KEEP YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION UPDATED

Updating all your contact information is helpful because it allows the Cooperative to contact you regarding your account if there is a need and it speeds up the power restoration process. Please take a moment to update your information. Visit our website: [www.meeker.coop/update-my-info](http://www.meeker.coop/update-my-info) or call us at 320-693-3231.





# STAY SAFE AROUND ELECTRICITY THIS HARVEST SEASON

*Look Up, Stay Alert, and Protect What Matters Most*



***As harvest season ramps up across central Minnesota, long hours, tight deadlines, and big equipment become part of daily life for farmers. Meeker Energy reminds everyone that while getting crops out of the field is top priority, staying safe around electricity is just as important.***

Modern farm equipment keeps getting larger and taller, which means the risk of accidental contact with overhead power lines also increases. A moment of distraction can lead to a dangerous and sometimes deadly situation. Before heading to the field, always look up and note the location of power lines. Plan a safe route for combines, grain augers, and other tall machinery, keeping at least 10 feet of clearance from any overhead lines.

If equipment does come in contact with a power line, stay in the cab and call 911 immediately. Warn others to stay away since the area around the machinery could be energized. Only exit the

cab if there is an immediate fire risk, and if you must leave, jump clear with your feet together, never touching the equipment and the ground at the same time.

It is also a good idea to share electric safety reminders with everyone helping on the farm. Make sure seasonal workers, family members, and truck drivers know where power lines are located and understand the steps to take if there is an accident.

Finally, take time to inspect the electrical systems around your farmstead before the busy season begins. 14-30-403 Report damaged power lines to Meeker Energy right away.

This harvest, let's keep safety at the top of the list. A few extra moments spent looking up and staying alert can prevent accidents, protect lives, and ensure a safe, successful season for everyone.

## FROZEN CHOCOLATE MINT SQUARES

*Submitted By: Gretchen Sanquist*

### INGREDIENTS

- 1½ C. chocolate wafers, crushed fine (about 30 wafers)
- 6 T. margarine, melted
- 1-7 oz. jar marshmallow creme
- ½ tsp. mint flavoring
- Green food coloring
- 1 C. miniature semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 2 C. whipping cream

### DIRECTIONS

In a bowl, combine crushed wafers and margarine. Press mixture firmly in a 7x11" pan. In medium bowl, beat the marshmallow creme, mint flavoring and green coloring with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth. Fold in ½ cup of the chocolate chips. Fold whipping cream into marshmallow creme mixture. Spread over crust. Sprinkle remaining ½ cup chocolate pieces over dessert. Freeze 6 hours. To serve, remove from freezer and let stand 10 to 15 minutes. Makes 8 servings.

Submit your favorite recipe for our next issue! The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. DEADLINE: September 30, 2025. Email to: [szeppelin@meeker.coop](mailto:szeppelin@meeker.coop) | Mail to: Meeker Energy, ATTN: Shane 1725 US Hwy 12 E, Ste 100, Litchfield, MN 55355

## FEATURED RECIPE



## CONTACT US

320-693-3231 | Fax: 320-693-2980  
1725 U.S. Hwy. 12 E, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355  
[www.meeker.coop](http://www.meeker.coop) | [www.vibrantbroadband.com](http://www.vibrantbroadband.com)

CEO/General Manager: Luke Johnson  
Contract Editor: Fuller Creative, LLC

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## MORE NEWS & CLASSIFIEDS ONLINE

Keep up-to-date with your Cooperative in-between issues of the Pioneer and browse our classifieds online at:  
[www.meeker.coop/news](http://www.meeker.coop/news).



## Score Big When You Refer a Friend!

We're in the business of making great connections. Thanks to subscribers like you, we get to keep delivering the reliable internet and hometown service you've come to expect from Vibrant Broadband.



**Now it's your turn to pass it on. Refer a friend to earn \$25 and a chance to win Vikings tickets!**

### HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

- Refer a friend to Vibrant Broadband
- When they sign up, you BOTH get a \$25 bill credit
- Each referral earns one entry for a chance to WIN 2 Vikings tickets\*

And the best part? There's no limit to how many friends you can refer!

### LEARN MORE

Visit: [vibrantbroadband.com/football](http://vibrantbroadband.com/football)

Call: 320-693-3231

\*Promotion ends September 30, 2025.



**Disaster happens fast. Be prepared.**

Fire and carbon monoxide detectors alert you and our 24/7 monitoring center for immediate action.



888.264.6380  
[heartlandss.com](http://heartlandss.com)