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● APRIL 2025

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Ways co-ops build  
effective boards**

**How the old farmhouse  
went modern**

**Recipes with an  
international flair**

**Win a Cuisinart® electric skillet ▶ See Page 3**

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**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

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editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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### ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Shirley Kellenberger, a Lyon REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!



# MY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE JOURNEY BEGAN WITH AN ACRONYM

BY JIM MILLER



Growing up on a farm in northwest Iowa near Fonda, I learned early on what “REC” stood for – rural electric cooperative. It was the power to light the farrowing house, a security light to illuminate the farm and power to keep the oven on for Mom’s pies. Back then, my acronyms were PE (physical education) – which I taught at a local school before coming home to farm – and farm terms like USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

## Acronyms give way to serving local members

Little did I know that when my local district director for Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association (ECA) asked me to run for our board of directors 17 years ago, I’d begin to learn a whole new set of acronyms on my journey in the electric cooperative world.

My first year as a co-op director was like learning a foreign language. PAC (Political Action Committee), IAEC (Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives) and NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) filled my conversations, and the list goes on. Our Calhoun County ECA manager at the time, Roxanne Carish, was patient with my questions, as were our seasoned board members who encouraged my education in cooperative responsibilities to serve our members. I began attending classes and learning this new language, and I am proud that I achieved the national Director Gold Credential through NRECA.

I was flattered five years ago when statewide director Steve Seidl of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative asked if I would consider running for the state board. I am honored to represent District 5 on IAEC’s board, where I now serve as board president.

## Every decision is for co-op members

A big influence in my co-op philosophy is this quote on Calhoun County ECA’s boardroom wall: “Every decision I make shall be based on what is best for the members-owners of this cooperative.”

This quote is why I am a proponent of attending the classes and conferences offered to directors, where I continuously add industry language to my vocabulary. It is also why I prepare for my local and state board meetings. How can I make the best decisions if I am not prepared and haven’t done my due diligence?

## Advocating for co-op members

Recently, I was asked what I hope to accomplish as president of the IAEC board, and my answer came from a conversation with Darrin Lynch from CFC (National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation). He said, “Jim, in my opinion, Iowa has one of the best, if not the best, statewide organizations in the country.” My hope is that IAEC continues to set the standard for integrity and service.

And while hope is not a strategy, I know our statewide association can continue to operate at a high level because we

have incredible leadership and staff. My fellow IAEC board members are willing to put in the time and effort to serve our members successfully.

But we don’t do it alone. It’s why I appreciate fellow directors who advocate for important electric issues with their state and federal legislators. We need each of you as co-op members to be committed and engaged with your local and state boards. Let us know your questions, and share your thoughts and needs with us so we can best represent you.

After 17 years as a co-op director, the acronyms now flow freely: ROFR (Right of First Refusal), G&T (Generation and Transmission Cooperative), RTO (Regional Transmission Organization) and so many others! But sometimes, my wife Rae stops and reminds me that not everyone knows the industry lingo. It’s a good reminder to be steadfast in sharing our industry knowledge in a way others will understand as we proudly provide safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power energy to those we serve.

*Jim Miller is the board president of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association.*

## EDITOR’S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A CUISINART® ELECTRIC SKILLET!

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#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month’s contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than April 30. 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 Amazon Kindle from the February issue was **Jeff Beal**, a **Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY APRIL 30!

# IOWANS MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD MONARCH HABITAT CONSERVATION GOALS

Over the past few years, Iowa has consistently invested in monarch butterfly conservation by adding new areas of monarch habitat throughout the state. The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium (IMCC) has recently updated its Monarch Conservation Effort Report, which summarizes monarch habitat establishment through 2022 in all 99 counties across the state. Iowa’s electric cooperatives are members of IMCC.

The data shows that since 2015, more than 690,000 acres of monarch butterfly habitat have been established across the state. These established acres represent 88% of the IMCC strategy’s low-end goal to reach 790,000 acres by 2038.

“This report demonstrates how we are making significant progress toward our overall target,” says Daniel Robison, holder of the endowed dean’s chair in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University. “Through the combined efforts of our members and partners, we are working to engage Iowans about the importance of monarch butterflies for our state and to make a positive difference on the landscape. This is a remarkable and sustained effort by all the consortium members.”

Habitat establishment is self-reported by individuals and organizations through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-managed Monarch Conservation Database, USDA’s



Photo Source: Isis Howard, Xerces Society

Conservation Reserve Program and Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, and HabiTally.

“Iowa continues to break records in conservation adoption, but this work is far from finished. I invite all Iowans to find ways to expand

pollinator habitat across our diverse landscapes while also enhancing soil health and protecting our water quality in our communities,” adds Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig.

To learn more about the IMCC, visit [monarch.ent.iastate.edu](http://monarch.ent.iastate.edu).

## NEW MONARCH CONSERVATION TOOL

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has created a new monarch conservation tool that may be useful for identifying collaborative opportunities in monarch conservation. It highlights areas of vulnerable grassland habitat across Iowa and locations of critical pollinator habitat. By identifying where these areas overlap, this tool may help plan future conservation efforts or inspire new collaborations.

Access the tool with the QR code to the right, and use the following tips to navigate the tool.



- When entering the tool, it might ask you to log into an ArcGIS account. You do not need to do this to interact with the map.
- The monarch and milkweed layer includes data from 2000-2011, so it doesn’t account for all the milkweed the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium has established across the state.
- Many layers include a clickable legend to the right of the name that describes the different color categories.
- Some of the layers include an expanding arrow that allows you to select different map layers, including the Midwest Conservation Blueprint 2024, which highlights areas across the state that are of conservation priority.

**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

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 PERIOD.

# SPRING FORWARD WITH OUTDOOR SAFETY TIPS

With the arrival of spring, there are some specific things to look out for regarding electric safety. Remember, you can't see, smell or hear electricity, so it's essential to take these precautions seriously.

## 1 Call before you dig

Spring is prime time for landscaping projects and "honey-do" lists around the home. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located. It's the law, and it could just save your life! Buried utility lines are everywhere, and an underground utility line is damaged every 6 minutes in the U.S. because someone decided to dig without calling 811 first.

## 2 Put safety first in the field

As you head into the fields to plant, always keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads to avoid low-hanging power lines; never

attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line.

If equipment comes into contact with a power line, assume the line is energized and deadly. The operator should NOT get off the machinery unless in immediate danger. If the operator touches the ground and the equipment at the same time, they will become a channel for electricity. Instead, the operator should stay on the equipment and immediately contact the local electric utility or 911 to report the incident so electricity can be shut off safely before exiting.

## 3 Stay away from downed power lines

Spring and summer weather can bring storms that lead to downed power lines. Assume any wire lying on the ground is carrying electricity and stay away from it. If you spot a downed wire, immediately call your local police and your electric co-op. Keep others from getting near the downed wire until help arrives. Never attempt to drive over a downed power line.



## 4 Move over or slow down on the road

We need your help keeping our lineworkers, engineers and maintenance workers safe on Iowa's roadways. If you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road; their families thank you.

## CO-OPS HOST ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND BUILDING TRADES CONFERENCE

Iowa's electric cooperatives hosted the 32nd annual Momentum is Building Conference in West Des Moines on Feb. 20-21. The event drew more than 165 contractors, construction trades professionals, electric cooperative representatives and students from across the state.

The conference gave attendees continuing education credits in Iowa's plumbing/mechanical, HVAC and electrical codes. Participants had valuable opportunities to network with industry peers, learn from leading

experts in energy efficiency and building trades, and gain insights into current energy regulations and incentives.

Sponsored by the Iowa Cooperatives for Energy Efficiency, this annual conference is a beneficial link between Iowa's construction industry and the services provided by local electric cooperatives, which collectively serve nearly 650,000 Iowans throughout all 99 counties.

Momentum is Building continues to deliver up-to-date building science information, practical hands-on



details, and new technology displays specifically designed for building trades professionals, including homebuilders, electricians and heating-plumbing contractors. Rural electric cooperative personnel from across Iowa joined their local contractors at the conference.



# WAYS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES BUILD STRONG BOARDS

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

Photo Source: Harrison County REC

The role of an electric cooperative board extends far beyond making decisions in a meeting room. It requires forward-thinking strategies, local advocacy, active engagement and a commitment to ongoing improvement. Co-op directors continuously participate in education and training opportunities, which enhance their skills and strengthen their knowledge of a complex industry.

At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' recent annual meeting, Richard Fagerlin of Peak Solutions and Dr. Keri Jacobs from

the University of Missouri-Columbia explored the essential qualities of high-performing cooperative boards and the steps directors take to ensure their long-term success. Hundreds of directors from Iowa's electric cooperatives attended the meeting.

## Understanding the big picture

Fagerlin and Jacobs emphasized that effective boards do more than meet and make decisions. They ensure the sustainability of their cooperative and prepare for future challenges. A key theme of their presentation was "future-proofing" the board – ensuring

that today's decisions position the cooperative for long-term success.

To serve the needs of electric co-ops and the member-consumers they serve – today and in the future – electric cooperative boards ask:

- What does our cooperative need from its board today?
- How can we best position ourselves for future leadership?
- How do we ensure a smooth transition when current board members step down?



Photo Source: Franklin REC



Richard Fagerlin (left) of Peak Solutions and Dr. Keri Jacobs from the University of Missouri-Columbia presented information about high-performing cooperative boards at IAEC's recent annual meeting.

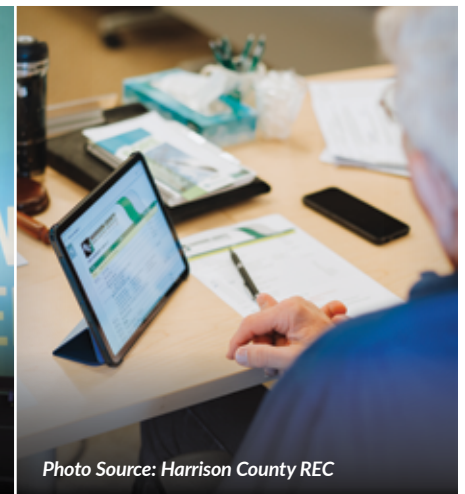


Photo Source: Harrison County REC

## Seven habits of effective board members

Fagerlin and Jacobs highlighted several common challenges boards face and seven ways board members are most effective in serving member-consumers' local needs.

- 1 Knowing their job.** Board members understand their responsibilities before, during and after meetings. This includes preparing adequately, staying engaged, and recognizing the difference between operational and strategic roles.
- 2 Finding the right balance of engagement.** Some directors may want to overreach and micromanage staff, while others leave decision-making to a few dominant voices. Striking the right balance is critical to effective leadership.
- 3 Ensuring equal participation.** Effective boards ensure that all members contribute to discussions. When one or two individuals dominate conversations, the board loses valuable perspectives and diversity of thought.
- 4 Prioritizing co-op needs.** Directors prioritize the cooperative's interests over personal motivations. An effective board remains united in its commitment to the organization's long-term success.
- 5 Passing the torch.** Board members must recognize when it's time to step aside for new leadership. Bringing in fresh perspectives while maintaining institutional knowledge is fundamental to the cooperative business model.
- 6 Maintaining confidentiality.** Board members understand what can and cannot be shared outside the boardroom. Ensuring consistent messaging strengthens trust within the cooperative and the broader membership.
- 7 Valuing diverse opinions.** Strong boards avoid the assumption that "everyone thinks like me" and foster productive discussions. The best boards value diverse opinions and encourage open dialogue.

# THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

Electric cooperative directors play a vital role in guiding the co-op's governance and strategic direction. Elected by the membership, they represent the interests of co-op member-consumers and ensure the co-op operates in alignment with its mission, values and the 7 Cooperative Principles.

Their responsibilities include setting policies, maintaining financial stability and shaping the co-op's long-term

vision. Directors stay informed on industry developments, oversee the CEO's leadership and engage with the community. They also support programs that enhance local economic development.

While directors do not manage daily operations, they provide high-level oversight to keep the co-op delivering safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power to its members.

## Ensuring long-term success

One of the central themes of the discussion was the need to future-proof the board. This means taking proactive steps to ensure the board evolves alongside the cooperative and the industry.

Some of the key strategies electric cooperatives take to future-proof their boards include:

- **Regular board assessments.** Evaluating the board's strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Director development.** Providing ongoing education and training opportunities.
- **Succession planning.** Identifying and mentoring future board members to ensure smooth transitions.
- **Engaging in strategic discussions.** Moving beyond day-to-day operations and focusing on long-term goals and sustainability.

## The power of good governance

Governance plays a crucial role in board effectiveness. Fagerlin and Jacobs distinguished between Big G Governance (formal structures, bylaws, and processes) and Little G Governance (culture, behavior and interpersonal dynamics). While having sound policies and procedures in place is essential, the board's culture and communication style can make or break its effectiveness.

For instance, agenda setting plays a key role in board productivity. Boards strive to make agendas that allow for meaningful strategic discussions. Balancing high-level strategy with operational details prevents boards from getting stuck in the weeds.

## The board and CEO relationship

The relationship between the board and the cooperative's CEO or general manager is vital to success. The board's role is to provide advice and accountability rather than micromanage operations. Future-proofing means boards position themselves as supportive partners for leadership rather than obstacles to progress.

One emerging challenge is the governance knowledge gap – the increasing complexity of electric cooperative management versus the time board members have available to stay informed. While cooperative managers work full-time in the industry, directors often serve on a part-time basis. To bridge this gap, directors commit to continuous learning and strategic thinking.

## Leading the cooperative of the future

The success of cooperatives depends on strong, well-functioning boards that adapt to changing times. By focusing on purpose, process and performance, cooperative boards ensure they remain effective and future-proofed for the challenges ahead.

Fagerlin and Jacobs emphasized that board leadership is a journey, not a destination. The best boards never stop learning, growing and adapting to meet the needs of their cooperative and its members. With the right mindset and commitment to excellence, today's boards lay the foundation for a thriving, sustainable future.

*Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.*





## PAD THAI WITH SHRIMP

- ½ pound rice noodles
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ pound shrimp (may substitute chicken or pork)
- 4 scallions or green onions, chopped
- ½ cup peanuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 3.5-ounce box pad thai sauce
- 2 cups bean sprouts
- cilantro
- lime wedges

Soak noodles according to directions. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add egg, scramble lightly 20 seconds. Add shrimp, stir until cooked. Add 2 tablespoons oil and rice noodles. Stir fry 5-7 minutes. Add scallions, peanuts and pad thai sauce. Stir one more minute, add bean sprouts. Garnish with cilantro and lime wedges. *Serves 4*

Diana Thorn • Marshalltown  
Consumers Energy

## MEDITERRANEAN LEG OF LAMB

- 4-5 pounds leg of lamb
- 3 cloves garlic
- salt
- pepper
- oregano
- 1 cup water
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce

Cut slits in lamb and insert slivers of garlic. Season with salt, pepper and oregano to taste. Roast in a shallow pan at 325 degrees F for 2½ hours. Drain excess fat from juices in pan. Combine water and tomato sauce and pour over lamb and roast 30 minutes more. Baste with sauce occasionally.

Marilyn O'Brien • Geneva  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## KOREAN BEEF

- 1 pound ground beef
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon ginger
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- rice, cooked

Cook meat and garlic, drain somewhat. Add the remaining ingredients, except rice. Simmer to blend flavors. Serve over rice. *Serves 4*

Grant DeSmet • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## ASIAN BEEF AND CABBAGE STIR FRY

- 1 pound ground beef
- ½ onion, diced
- ½ head cabbage, diced
- 1 cup carrot, shredded
- ½ red pepper, diced
- 2 teaspoons ginger
- 4 cloves garlic
- soy sauce, to taste
- Japanese barbecue sauce, to taste
- rice or ramen noodles
- green onions, optional
- sesame seeds, optional

Fry hamburger and onion, drain. Add cabbage, carrots, pepper, spices and sauces. Cook until tender. Cook noodles according to package instructions and add when finished. Cook until flavors are blended. Top with green onions and sesame seeds, if desired.

Barb Walter • Alton  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative



## NORWEGIAN KRINGLES

- 6 egg yolks
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4½ cups flour, divided
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt

Mix all ingredients together except ½ cup flour. Chill overnight or several hours. Then, if needed, add additional ½ cup flour and roll into pencil thin figure eights. Bake on greased cookie sheets at 400 degrees F for about 7 minutes, or until slightly brown. Spread with butter to serve.

Hana Hartter • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## EAST INDIA PARTY MIX

- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon whole mustard seed
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1½ cups Rice Chex
- 1½ cups Corn Chex
- 1½ cups Crispix
- 1 cup peanuts
- 1 cup cashews
- ½ teaspoon curry powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup M&M candies

Add mustard seeds to melted butter and cook until seeds pop. Remove from heat and stir in Worcestershire sauce. In large bowl, mix all cereal and nuts. Sprinkle curry and cinnamon on cereal mixture. Pour butter and sauce over top, mix well to coat. Put in shallow pan and bake at 250 degrees F for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Cool completely, then stir in chocolate chips and candies. Store in airtight containers. Works well with gluten-free cereals.

Mabel Fisher • Sigourney  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPINACH AND CHEESE MANICOTTI

- 1 15-ounce container ricotta
- 2 cups mozzarella, shredded, divided
- ¼ cup Romano cheese, grated
- 1 10-ounce package frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, minced, plus more for garnish
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- black pepper, to taste
- 14 manicotti shells
- 4 cups marinara sauce, divided

Combine ricotta, 1 cup mozzarella, Romano cheese, spinach, parsley, egg, salt and pepper. Stuff ¼ cup mixture into each shell. Spread ¾ cup marinara sauce in a 9x13-inch pan. Arrange shells on top and cover with marinara sauce to submerge all pasta. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Top with remaining 1 cup mozzarella and bake uncovered for 15 minutes. Garnish with fresh parsley. Serves 7

Anna Domnick • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## CHICKEN CURRY

- ½ cup yogurt
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 whole chicken, cut up
- 5 tablespoons olive oil (or vegetable oil)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- pinch garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 6 peppercorns
- 1 cinnamon stick
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 cup water
- 2 potatoes, cubed
- basmati rice
- frozen peas, optional

Mix yogurt and salt. Remove skin from chicken. Coat chicken pieces with yogurt mixture and set in bowl 30 minutes. Sauté chicken pieces in oil until brown. Mix onion, green pepper, ginger, garlic powder, cardamom, coriander, cumin, peppercorns, cinnamon stick, turmeric, tomato sauce and water. Place chicken in slow cooker and pour sauce mixture over chicken. Add potatoes and cook until chicken is tender and potatoes are cooked. Thawed peas can be added at the end, if desired. Serve over basmati rice. Serves 4-6

Sheila Arney • Marshalltown  
Consumers Energy

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The exterior of a new modern farmhouse home features vertical siding, a front porch and natural wood columns. Steel shed roofs over the windows add contrast and interest.  
Photo Source: Hibbs Luxury Homes



# HOW THE OLD FARMHOUSE WENT MODERN

## DESIGN TRENDS FOR RURAL HOMES

BY JIM WINNERMAN

Many are familiar with interior decorating styles known as mid-century modern, contemporary or simply modern. Less familiar may be a more recent approach known as “modern farmhouse,” a trend in home decor and design evoking a feeling of warmth and comfort.

The origin of the farmhouse can be traced to Germany and Scandinavia, where they were built to house farm workers. Then, it was not a style but a necessary shelter for a way of life. Farmhouse architecture arrived in the U.S. in the 1700s. Since then, farmhouses have undergone various iterations, from being purely functional as they were in Europe

to slowly morphing into various styles of interior and exterior design adopted by everyday families.

Today’s popular modern farmhouse version grew out of the show “Fixer Upper,” hosted by Chip and Joanna Gaines from Waco, Texas. It aired for five seasons on HGTV (Home and Garden Television), a network focusing on reality programming based on home improvement and real estate.

Their show premiered with each episode featuring a home they were renovating. As their engaging personalities and decorating style aired featuring one home after another, their personal

appeal and approach to interior design gained popularity.

Prominent features included architectural elements, like the use of natural materials, such as wood and stone, and an open and airy floor plan conducive to a comfortable lifestyle. The decor was an eclectic mix of furnishings and accessories. Color choices were warm and neutral hues that did not overwhelm a room.

Because it was an approach that could be used inside a home of any architectural style, it had immediate and widespread public appeal. They ventured away from the pure countryside approach of



simplicity, function and nostalgia characteristic of earlier farmhouse decor and introduced a more relaxed way of living and entertaining. The design features smooth, clean lines and materials while retaining the rustic charm of historic farms. By 2016, the Gaines had unexpectedly created a new trend that soon had its own name – modern farmhouse.

### Designs based on personal interpretation

Modern farmhouse design can incorporate a traditional wooden kitchen table set in a large kitchen with vaulted ceilings and wooden accent beams, while the overall design is sleek, functional and bright.

Farmhouse style is a combination of the best of old and new. It remains rustic, yet it is chic, contemporary, country and modern at the same time.

The practical part of modern farmhouse design is frequently expressed through open shelves in living spaces. In family rooms, shelves contain family heirlooms and collectibles. In the kitchen, clear glass cabinet doors display everyday functional utensils, like dishes, textiles and other practical objects, as well as rustic cooking decor.

Early farmhouses did not have walls made from drywall like those found in most new and existing homes. Walls were shiplap, beadboard or tongue-and-groove boards, and using the same material today is an important part of modern farmhouse decor. Painted in shades of white and installed vertically or horizontally, either approach delivers the coziness found in the charm of historic farms.

### The most important room in the house

Although stainless-steel kitchen appliances would not seem to fit the modern farmhouse approach to decor, they are easily incorporated into a kitchen that features the clean, straight lines of Shaker cabinets, shiplap walls and other natural elements like soapstone sinks.

Similarly, modern farmhouse design does not usually incorporate busy, repetitive patterns on furniture,



This kitchen features a center island with vintage style turned foot legs and a built-in low cabinet to display large pieces of cookware. Natural elements include a wood plank floor and stone surrounding the alcove. Photo Source: Jim Winnerman



A coastal farmhouse living room on Cape Cod features sea blue accents, a sliding barn door into the utility room, a light gray wood plank floor, sea foam green chairs and a contemporary painting of a beach scene. Photo Source: Jim Winnerman

walls or draperies; however, kitchens can again be an exception. It is not unusual for a subtly patterned tile backsplash to be used above the oven, where a geometric design works well and does not compete with white subway tile installed nearby.

A kitchen island styled as a table with rustic turned legs beneath its countertop, copper drawer knobs and pulls, and a butcher block surface all work anywhere in a modern farmhouse kitchen.

When looking for basic design materials, look for historical pieces or items that could be found in nature. Examples include wood, slate, marble, soapstone, brick, aged brass, cast iron and tin. Most importantly, both comfort and function are goals in modern farmhouse decor, versus aesthetics, trends or a consistent sense of design.

### Modern farmhouse exterior

While interior decor for a modern farmhouse design is popular when existing homes are remodeled, builders, architects and contractors of new homes have been quick to add a modern farmhouse exterior aesthetic to their portfolios.

Considerations for an exterior design include the siding and color, roof, lighting and the entrance that greets guests from the curb to the front door.

As for color, the same approach applies outside as it does inside. Neutral hues, such as whites, creams and beiges, are commonly used

for a clean and fresh exterior. That palette provides a background that easily incorporates elements such as natural stone on a portion of the facade, wooden shutters and wooden porch railings and posts that evoke a rustic, familiar feel.

A combination of vertical or horizontal siding is often blended with cedar shingles under the roof peaks to add interest and texture. Vintage barn-style lantern light fixtures or industrial lighting are popular near the front door. Nothing exudes a modern farmhouse exterior like a welcoming, comfortable front porch.

A front door can be contrary to an overall paint scheme. Pale colors work, but almost any color can add texture and interest to the entrance. Having a door in a pleasant shade of red, yellow or blue is more welcoming, which conveys a happy vibe to arriving guests.

Finally, incorporating the true meaning of modern farmhouse design into the exterior means using metal barn-style roofing to create additional color and texture contrast. However, traditional shingles can also be used with metal shed roof accents above window overhangs or for just the porch roof.

Top it all with a wooden sliding barn door replacing a traditional front door, add a picket fence in the front yard, and turn that house into a modern farmhouse home.

*Jim Winnerman is a guest contributor for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# THE MODERN FARMHOUSE REMIX

BY JIM WINNERMAN

While core elements in modern farmhouse decor remain consistent, several variations in design have been inspired by lifestyle, location and cultural differences. Here are some of the most common offshoots and their discernable differences from the modern farmhouse style.

**Scandinavian farmhouse.** Characteristics include little adornment or decoration, simple cabinetry fronts and built-ins, understated light fixtures, light wood flooring and muted shades of color complemented by black or grey accents.

**French farmhouse.** Features architectural details such as sconces and painted brick, which combine an appreciation for simplicity with a desire for decoration. Antique accents with age-earned patinas are often used with zinc and galvanized metals and ironwork.

**Rustic farmhouse.** Embodies a more rugged and raw aesthetic. Primitive or rustic furniture, handcrafted decor, galvanized metal and warm-to-grey rustic woods are features of this style.

## THE PERFECT PALETTE

An essential element of the modern farmhouse style is the use of correct colors to ensure the background in each room works seamlessly with the furniture and decor. Subtle shades allow key pieces of furniture to be highlighted and create a comfortable feeling.



Photo Source: Jim Winnerman

### Common color choices

- **White:** White walls make rooms feel bright and open
- **Warm neutrals:** Cream, beige and brown hues convey a natural and comfortable feeling
- **Cool neutrals:** Colors like gray, silver, blue and light green are inherently soothing and serene
- **Earthy accents:** The colors of nature found in wood, greenery, fall leaves and a clear blue sky are never bold or jarring but are relaxing and familiar

**Coastal farmhouse.** Incorporates a bright white and cool medium blue palette, shiplap walls and white-stained wood floors. Nautical and oceanic art are trademarks of this decor.

**Colonial farmhouse.** Prevalent are authentic historical era references such as wide-planked wooden floors stained in natural colors, patterned wallpaper trimmed with a printed border and subtle murals. Authentic

or reproduction Colonial lighting fixtures and antique furniture add finishing touches.

**Industrial farmhouse.** Has a masculine feeling that incorporates black iron furniture accents set against a warm palette of off-whites. The use of industrial lighting and hardware, heavy and weathered exposed beams, and galvanized metals show the influence of heavy farm machinery and structures.



A hammered copper apron sink is a focal point in this kitchen. Photo Source: Hibbs Luxury Homes

## NOTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

In the first farmhouses in the 17th century, sinks were large for a purpose. Water was not accessed from indoor plumbing but in a bucket filled from a water source outside the home, such as a well or a stream. Not only did the sink require a deep basin to accommodate the pail, but depth was also necessary to wash large kitchen utensils before the luxury of a dishwasher. They were even convenient for giving an infant a bath or washing clothes.

In the 1930s, as kitchens became "modernized," the traditional farmhouse sink was replaced by stainless steel sinks mounted flush with the countertop, even though

reaching over the extra space into the sink was less convenient.

Today, the many benefits of a vintage farmhouse sink have been elevated into modern designs and materials, giving them a renewed flair consistent with the modern farmhouse style. The style possesses a genuine antique character and gives today's kitchen an authentic farmhouse-style feel.

Modern farmhouse apron sinks still include classic porcelain finishes, but models are also available in a wide range of colors and materials, such as granite, marble, travertine, soapstone and copper.



# PREPARE NOW FOR SUMMER SAVINGS

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Spring is in the air, and before you know it, summer will be here. There are many ways to get a jump-start on preventing high bills and energy waste this summer.

## Add equipment to spring cleaning

Add your cooling equipment to the spring-cleaning checklist. An annual tune-up by a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) professional should include refrigerant charging, airflow adjustment, and condenser and evaporator fan coil cleaning. This helps maximize your system's efficiency and lifespan, reducing wasted energy and costs.

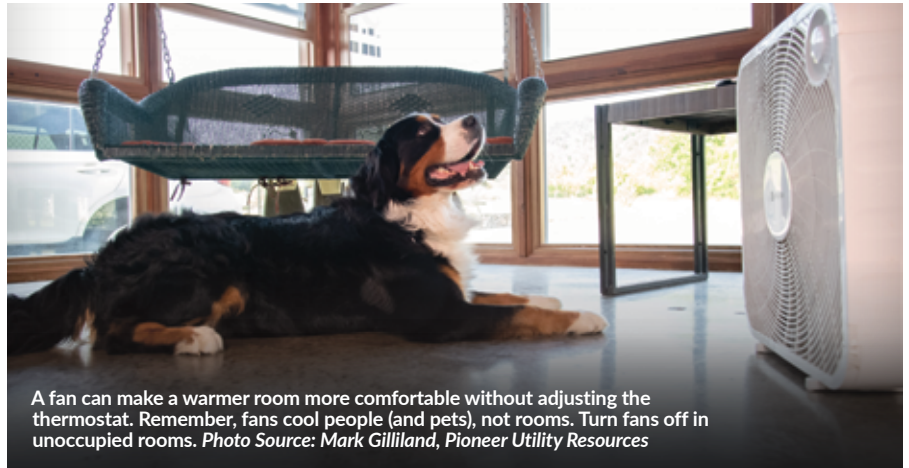
Some HVAC companies offer discounts for cleaning equipment during the months when they are less busy. Once high temperatures hit, they are more likely to be swamped with calls to repair or replace broken equipment. Signing up for an annual maintenance plan may provide additional savings.

A dirty furnace filter can waste energy by causing your system to work harder. Make sure you have a stack of replacement filters ready to go so you are more likely to replace them as needed. Filters tend to be less expensive if you buy them in bulk.

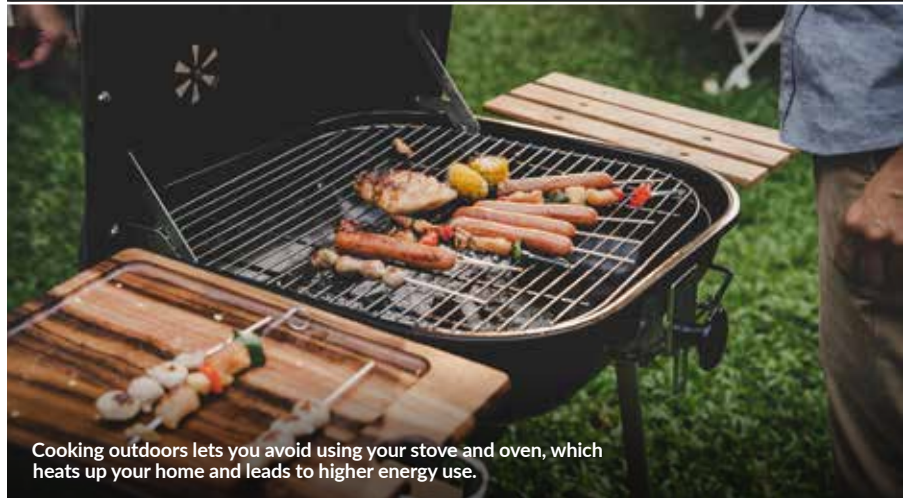
Ductless heat pumps, also known as mini-splits, have a filter in the indoor unit, which should be cleaned. If you clean the indoor filter yourself, be sure to turn the unit off before removing the filter and let it dry completely before putting it back.

## Keep an eye on thermostat and fan settings

As we transition from cool to warm weather, watch your thermostat settings. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting cooling temperatures to 78 degrees F when you are home and higher when you are away. You can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling by adjusting your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees from its normal setting for eight hours a day.



A fan can make a warmer room more comfortable without adjusting the thermostat. Remember, fans cool people (and pets), not rooms. Turn fans off in unoccupied rooms. Photo Source: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources



Cooking outdoors lets you avoid using your stove and oven, which heats up your home and leads to higher energy use.

One way to feel cooler is using fans in the room you're in during the day or when you're sleeping. Using a fan can make a warm room feel cooler without having to adjust the thermostat. Remember: fans cool people, not rooms. Turn fans off in unoccupied rooms.

If your ceiling fan has a reverse function, make sure you flip the switch so it blows air down into the living space. The reverse function is great at circulating warm air in the winter, and you can maximize the comfort benefit of a fan by switching the flow of air seasonally.

## Consider peak load and cooking outdoors

Another consideration before summer hits is your home's impact

on peak load – when demand for electricity is highest. This typically occurs in the morning when people are getting ready for work or school and in the evening when they return home. Your electric cooperative must manage the energy use of all its consumers, which can be a challenge. Consider starting the dishwasher before you go to sleep or starting a load of laundry outside of your co-op's peak times.

Cooking outdoors in summer is a great way to save energy. Using the stove or oven heats your kitchen, which requires more energy for cooling.

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

# READERSHIP SURVEY: WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK!

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# CELEBRATING A SEASON OF NEW LIFE AND HOPE

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Think back to when you were in high school. If you're like me, you rarely considered your teachers had a life outside of the classroom.

As an adult, however, you see these influential people in a new light. I was thinking about this when I watched a social media video about "Why I'm an Organ Donor" from Stewart Memorial Community Hospital (SMCH) in my hometown of Lake City.

## A life-changing diagnosis

As someone who checked "yes" to being an organ donor when I renewed my driver's license, the video made me think of Scott Nesbitt (Nez), my high school speech teacher. I knew he'd received a liver transplant, and I was grateful he was willing to share his incredible story.

It started on May 12, 2009, when Nez was 47. The Pocahontas native (who was in great health) had been teaching high school English and speech classes for 25 years, mainly in Lake City. He and his wife Janelle were raising their three school-aged children: MaeLaan, Brock and Jaden.

The Saturday before Mother's Day, Nez suddenly felt nauseous. When a high fever kicked in, he and his family chalked it up to influenza, which was going around the local school. Nez took acetaminophen, but nothing helped. Within a few days, he made an appointment at SMCH to see his family doctor, who suspected Nez had contracted a virus.

Things only got worse. Nez was admitted to the hospital on day four after his symptoms appeared. Tests revealed alarming liver counts, which measure the proteins, enzymes and other substances that indicate how well the liver is functioning.

"While counts of 0 to 40 are normal, mine were 8,000 to 10,000," Nez explains.



Scott Nesbitt (center, holding granddaughter) with his family.

"My first question was, 'Am I dying?'"

Nez's doctor immediately consulted with an organ transplant team at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) in Omaha, where Nez was transported by ambulance.

"Had my doctor waited 12 more hours to make this decision, I would have died," says Nez, who was immediately put on the national donor network system in search of a liver.

Nez had contracted hepatitis A, which inflames the liver and is transmitted when a person ingests contaminated food or water. He had also taken too much acetaminophen, which stressed his infected liver. "I was poisoning myself and didn't realize it," he says.

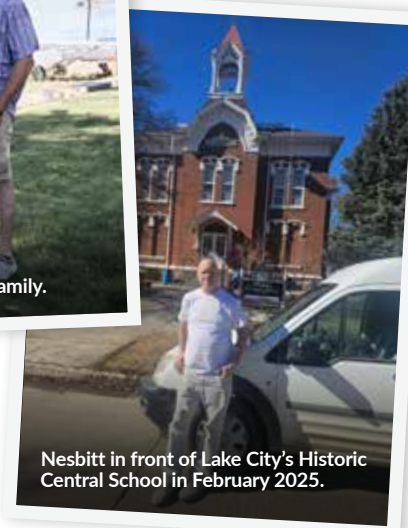
## A transplant saves a life

While UNMC's skilled doctors perform about 350 liver transplants a year, Nez had nearly everything working against him. His body was shutting down, plus he had a rare blood type requiring an exact match. As the hours passed, things looked hopeless.

Then, a miracle happened for Nez. He received a liver from a 33-year-old named Brian Gorman. The liver was flown from Cheyenne, Wyoming,



Nesbitt in his hospital bed in 2009.



Nesbitt in front of Lake City's Historic Central School in February 2025.

to Omaha. While Gorman had died by suicide, this tragedy offered new life for Nez, who had been perfectly healthy a mere eight days earlier.

The transplant wasn't without its complications, but it was successful. Nez was reunited with his family, which now includes nine grandchildren. He returned to teaching in the fall of 2009. While Nez retired in 2022, he continues to work about 30 hours a week with his painting business.

"I appreciate everything so much, including things I used to take for granted," says Nez, 63, who serves with his church's youth group and chairs the SMCH board of directors.

Nez's story is timely since April is National Donate Life Month. It also reflects the timeless message of Easter, a cherished time of renewal, new life and faith, where the season's greatest gift is hope.

*Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).*

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