

# NEBRASKA

Magazine

September 2024



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BIG POWER**

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Savings On

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September 2024



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Garden tractor pulling demands both power and precision, as drivers pull weighted sleds down a track, testing the limits of their machines and their skills. With roots in a local automotive repair shop, the Topp family's passion for tractor pulling has evolved into a shared family pursuit, showcasing the perfect blend of engineering, competition, and community spirit.



## 14 Youth Tour: Nebraska Students Embark on a Leadership Journey in Washington, D.C.

In June, public power districts and electric cooperatives across the U.S. sent groups of high school students to Washington, D.C., for the 2024 National Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. Nebraska sent 17 students and two chaperones, representing Nebraska public power districts and electric cooperatives.

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*In Nebraska, where roaring tractor pulls are a tradition, the Topp family of Pilger is making waves with a twist—garden tractor pulling. Photograph by LaRayne Topp*





Wayne Price

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## Join the fight against copper theft

Metal theft continues to plague electric utilities in Nebraska and all over America. It is a crime that endangers lives and can result in thousands of dollars in damages ultimately paid for by you—the electric consumer.

Thieves are attracted to copper wire as an easy source of cash, stealing it from a variety of sources and selling it for scrap. They often climb power poles, scale substation or storeyard fences, and break into buildings to steal the precious metal—almost always endangering themselves and others in the process.

Stealing copper might seem like a quick way to make a few dollars to a would-be thief, but it's illegal, it's costly, and it's not worth a life. Working with electricity and any metal is a dangerous combination, even for employees that are trained and using the proper equipment. Thieves who enter a substation or climb a power pole to steal copper and survive are incredibly lucky. They are risking their life for a few bucks.

Because of the surge in copper theft in recent years many public power districts and electric cooperatives have begun to stamp copper and aluminum wire with an identification number to deter theft. Stolen wire is usually sold for scrap at recycling centers for cash.

Thieves may not understand that they are risking their lives by taking copper from utility poles or substations, where high transmission voltage is stepped down to a lower current for distribution lines. The Nebraska Rural Electric Association urges you to follow these guidelines to guard against electrical dangers and prevent copper theft.

- Never enter or touch equipment inside a substation; stay away from power lines and anything touching a power line.
- If you notice anything unusual with electric facilities, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, or hanging wire, contact your rural electric utility immediately.
- If you see anyone around electric substations or electric facilities other than public power district or electric cooperative personnel, call the police.
- Install motion-sensor lights on the outside of your house, out-buildings and business to deter possible thieves.
- If you work in construction, do not leave any wires or plumbing unattended or leave loose wire at the job site, especially overnight.
- Help spread the word about the deadly consequences that can result from trying to steal copper or aluminum wire.

Please help prevent these thefts. If you notice anything unusual, call your local electric utility immediately. If you see anyone other than utility personnel or contractors around substations or other electric facilities, call the police.



Shawna Glendy

Shawna Glendy is the General Manager of Niobrara Electric Association, headquartered in Lusk, Wyoming

## How Beneficial Electrification is Redefining Our Energy Future

In a time where there seems to be a sudden urgency to address climate change, Beneficial Electrification emerges as a strategy to transform our energy landscape. This approach involves replacing fossil fuel (propane, heating oil and gasoline) use with electricity in ways that reduce emissions and offer a way to a cleaner future. Beneficial Electrification is not just about changing energy sources but also about enhancing efficiency and reducing environmental impact.

The goal of Beneficial Electrification is to increase the availability of renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and hydroelectric power. The number one goal seems to be to provide power to the grid using these types of renewables to cut greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, electric vehicles (EVs) produce less emissions than gasoline powered vehicles. Similarly, electric heat pumps for home heating and cooling can be more efficient than traditional oil or natural gas systems, especially when powered by renewable electricity.

The environmental benefits can be substantial as the electric grid becomes greener and the reduction of carbon emission increases.

In addition to the environmental gains, beneficial electrification may also have economic advantages. Many jobs have been created by the growing demand for renewable energy infrastructure, EVs and energy efficient appliances.

However, as with any type of change, Beneficial Electrification has downsides as well. As we all know in the energy business, our main goal is to provide reliable, affordable electricity. The cost of adding renewable energy to the electrical grid is substantial. However, we are told that renewable energy is still a cheaper form of energy than fossil fuels. Will that still be the case when the government stops offering incentives through avenues such as tax credits, rebates and grants?

Much consideration needs to be given to the environment in which the EV or any other type of renewable will be used. Many ranchers have installed solar panels to help provide water to their stock wells. This is a good way to ensure your cattle do not go without water because the wind isn't blowing, and the windmill isn't pumping. However, what happens when the sun doesn't shine? There have been many days where the solar unit quit working because of cloudy conditions and the tank went dry. That is where reliability is an issue, when the wind doesn't blow, and the sun doesn't shine, what happens then?

Beneficial Electrification can be an asset and can help slow global warming; however, a commonsense approach needs to be in the forefront of everyone's minds. We can work together towards a cleaner future while providing reliable, affordable electricity to everyone in the present.

# Small Tractors, Big Power

Nebraskans are used to tractor pulls. Boasting gigantic souped-up John Deeres and Minneapolis Molines, these monsters belch a volcanic spray of diesel smoke into the atmosphere while chugging down a track. But how about a garden tractor pull? Are you imagining a calm and quiet lawn mower, purring along a grass-strewn path toward a finish line? Neither of these descriptions begins to capture a garden tractor pull.

These garden tractors thrive on customized chassis, run on modified tires and explode into action with the vrooming full tilt of a 116-decibel motorcycle engine, double pistons firing. Spectators choose their favorite green or blue or red streak burning up the track; the only thing slowing down a rig is the weighted sled behind it. Now that's garden tractor pulling.

Just ask Dustin Topp of Pilger, Nebraska. He builds 'em. He pulls 'em. So do his wife Becky and two sons, Alan and Cameron. Garden tractor pulling competitors can sign up for one of a number of classes. Stock classes are a garden-variety tractor straight in from the backyard. A super modified model is typically highly customized and optimized for performance, powered with a modified motorcycle engine, tires and other components. Remove the deck, and you'll be in the sportsmen class.

The goal in all three divisions is to pull a sled with increasingly heavy weights as far down a track as the driver can muster.

Tractor pulls test not only the pulling strength of a tractor but also the skill of its operator. A metal sled is chained to the tractor; atop the sled is a weight box stacked with metal weights. Weight is added gradually, such that the tractor encounters increasing resistance. The weight the sled is exerting as the weight moves up its rails determines the difficulty of the pull and the strength each tractor requires to successfully compete—along with its speed. Tractor divisions are based on certain weights.

Perhaps it's this mix of tractor modification and resistance to outside forces that attracted Dustin originally, as he operates an automotive repair and custom body shop in Pilger. He began the sport 22 years ago when buddy Craig Janke of Winside, Nebraska, had begun competing.



“We hung out together and I made one like his,” Dustin said of his 100 percent homemade tractor which boasts a car rear end and individual brakes. When Becky pulls, she drives her husband’s rig.

Youngsters like Alan, 12, and Cameron, 9, are fierce competitors, similar to International Harvesters’ Cub Cadet tractors which may be small but are heavy-duty. The brothers drive stock garden tractors which are regulated as to their speed.

“There are lots of young girls that pull, and beat up on the boys,” Becky said with a smile. “Lots of wives come too. They put their kids on the starting line, and they know where to put the weights,” which are added on the back, under the middle, beneath the seats or in the front.

A pulling tractor is at its best when the majority of its weight is on the rear tires, such that the front tires make scant contact with the track. Taking track conditions into





*Left: Dustin and Becky Topp's sons, Alan and Cameron, compete in the garden tractor pull at Wisner in June.*

*Below: Becky and Dustin Topp, and sons Cameron and Alan, all take part in the sport of garden tractor pulling.*



Clubs at Wisner, Lincoln, Concord, Gretna and West Point in Nebraska, plus Missouri Valley in Iowa.

But that's not all. They've also traveled as far as four hours distant to out-of-state meets in South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas and Wisconsin. Members often travel "in packs," Becky explained, staying overnight at the same hotels during two-day pulls. The Topp's also attend indoor tractor pulls during the winter months, often adding up 15 to 20 pulls a year.

Garden tractor pullers are like family, the Topp's say. The sport is family-oriented; it's a close-knit group.

"They all rally behind you if something happens," Becky explained. "Here, let me help you,' they say, and help you get something fixed even though they'll be competing against you."

Of the 20-plus families who are members of the Western Iowa group, it's common to see 45 tractors show up at a meet, with nearly 100 hooks on average.

The Topp's sons began racing when each was only four years old, competing in classes designed for youngsters. Parents

consideration, weights may need to be juggled around, improving the machine's traction and preventing wheel slippage.

Since they first became interested, the Topp family has competed at area county fairs and town celebrations, and with Garden Tractor Pullers throughout Nebraska and Iowa. In 2013, they got into even bigger tractor pulling events.

Recently, they've joined the Western Iowa Garden Tractor Pullers. Dustin serves on the board of directors and Becky is in charge of the group's website. Officers are necessary to track expenses encountered when staging each pulling event, plus memberships. Pulling fees go toward "legal stuff," as Dustin describes it, plus there are hook fees each time an entry runs the track.

"That goes with it," he said.

Much of the Topp family's free time is spent in garden tractor pulling. They've competed with Nebraska and Iowa

**Continued on Page 8**





## From Page 6

help run the clutch when their kids are really young, Becky said, gradually letting go of operations once the youngster is in control.

“It’s a fun activity,” Cameron said. “I like to do it in the summer and my friends come along. It’s not like a sport you get mad about.”

Now that they’re older, Cameron and Alan often compete against adults, and oftentimes bring a trophy home. A wall in the Topp home can attest to that; it’s lined with trophies the family has earned. Points can be earned at every pull. They’re totaled and at the end of the year the overall winner is awarded a plaque, trophy or jacket.

Adults compete in the stock classes as well. The engines in this category are motivated by ten horse power, compared to the super modified division in which Dustin races at more than 200 horse power. Even though Dustin’s tractors are named Black Widow and even Slow Ride, Dustin doesn’t let the name fool anyone.

“I could pass a car on the highway easy,” he said.

As Becky says, garden tractor pullers, sporting flame-retardant suits and helmets, have tunnel vision making their way down the track. “It’s an adrenalin rush,” she



*Top: Dustin Topp helps the Topp’s son Alan weigh in before the pull.*

*Above: Becky Topp checks the schedule at the garden tractor pull held at Wisner in June.*

explained. “You see only the track and the flag guy at the end.”

It’s even more than that for son Alan. “Every once in a while I get to work on my tractor with my dad,” he said.

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# Lights Out, Savings On

## The Power of Automated Switches in Your Home



by **Cory Fuehrer, NPPD Energy Efficiency Program Manager**

In June of 1752, Benjamin Franklin and his son, William, conducted the famous kite-in-a-thunderstorm experiment to demonstrate the relationship between lightning and electricity. By attaching the kite to a Leyden jar, which was an early type of battery invented seven years earlier, they attempted to collect “electric fire” to be discharged at a later time.

Fifteen years prior, while writing under the heading, “Necessary Hints to Those That Would Be Rich,” in “Poor Richard's Almanack,” Franklin wrote, “A penny saved is twopence dear,” which as we know translates to, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” Had the order of these two events been reversed, might he have written, “A kilowatt-hour saved is a kilowatt-hour earned”?

Though unlikely he would have, this modified phrase demonstrates one of the simplest energy-saving strategies: When a light is no longer needed, switch it “off.” Unfortunately, it is one of the most overlooked efficiency opportunities in our daily lives. According to the U.S. Department of Energy’s 2020 Residential Energy Consumption Survey, the average single-family home has 85 lights. With so many, it is easy to see how one or more of these opportunities are often overlooked.

Fortunately there is an easy way to manage this problem: Change the switch! Rather than relying on yourself or your family members to remember to turn lights off by flipping the toggle switch on the wall, install a switch that automatically turns lights, fans, or other electrical loads off when they are no longer needed.

In the bathrooms, change out the standard switch to the fan with a timer switch. While bathroom fans are essential for removing excess humidity, they often run long after bathing is complete. A timer switch ensures

enough run-time but stops the unnecessary removal of conditioned air that your furnace or air conditioner will need to make more of.

Occupancy sensor switches are a great way to illuminate a room without flicking the switch. Occupancy sensors use passive infrared (PIR) and/or ultrasonic sensors to detect the presence or absence of occupants in a space. PIR detects occupants’ presence by sensing the difference between heat emitted by moving people and background heat. Ultrasonic sensors detect the presence of people by sending ultrasonic sound waves into a space and measuring the speed at which they return. They look for frequency changes caused by a moving person. If no one is detected in a room after a pre-set period of time, the switch automatically turns the lights off.

A relative of the occupancy sensor switch is the vacancy sensor switch. Unlike an occupancy sensor, a person must manually turn the lights on. But when no one in the room is detected, a vacancy sensor switches the lights off just like an occupancy sensor. These work especially well in teenagers’ bedrooms, as I have found my daughters very capable of turning these lights “on” but seldom “off.”

A third option you may consider is a smart switch. Most smart switch options use either Wi-Fi or ZigBee communications and pair directly with your home computer network or smartphone. Many smart switches offer built-in smart dimming capabilities and operation scheduling and can be paired with motion-, occupancy- and photo-sensors. As home automation becomes ever-more desired, smart switches are becoming popular in newly constructed homes.



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# YOUTH TOUR

## Nebraska Students Embark on a Leadership Journey in Washington, D.C.

In June, public power districts and electric cooperatives across the U.S. sent groups of high school students to Washington, D.C., for the 2024 National Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. Nebraska sent 17 students and two chaperones, representing Nebraska public power districts and electric cooperatives.

While in D.C., Nebraska's Youth Tour delegation visited many of the major monuments and memorials, including the Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson Memorials. They also spent time on Capitol Hill, meeting with Senators Deb Fischer and Pete Ricketts, and Congressman Adrian Smith.

The students were inspired by extraordinary exhibits found in the Smithsonian Museums, including the Hope Diamond and the Wright Brothers' 1903 Flyer. They also visited Gettysburg and Mount Vernon, as well as the National Holocaust Museum.

The Youth Tour experience provides students with a chance to see history come to life; the tour also gives them an opportunity to connect with other student leaders just like them from across the country.

Myles Bishop of Grant, Neb., was selected as Nebraska's Youth Leadership Council member. He was sponsored by Midwest Electric Cooperative Corporation.

Youth Tour is just one of the ways the Nebraska Rural Electric Association is investing in our future leaders. Nebraska's public power districts and electric co-ops do so much more than provide safe, reliable and affordable power—we are dedicated to improving the futures of students in our community because we know they are next in line to lead the way.



**Onyx Smith**  
**Dawson PPD**

My trip to Washington, D.C., was truly an experience unlike any other. From being able to meet other young leaders and make life long friendships to being able to visit the amazing memorials all throughout the city. My favorite part of the trip was having a private tour of the capital with Congressman Adrian Smith. Washington, D.C. was an amazing experience and I am so thankful for having had the opportunity to go.



**Ian Schiller**  
**Cuming County PPD**

The trip to our nation's capital was one that you can remember. My favorite part was getting to see the changing of the guards at Arlington National Cemetery, guarding the tomb of the unknown soldier. Taking this trip allowed me to see what actually happens within the political and governmental part of our country, and I think every kid should have that same opportunity.







**Kaydence Long  
McCook PPD**

Visiting Washington, D.C. was a truly impactful experience. The Lincoln Memorial stood out the most, with its significance leaving a lasting impression on me. The travel and meetings gave me a deeper understanding of the city! The food was fantastic too, adding a delightful flavor to the whole adventure. Overall, the trip enriched my views and made me more appreciative of our nation's heritage. Thank you for such a memorable trip!



**Austin Sydow  
Southwest PPD**

The trip impacted me by making me want to travel and sightsee more. I enjoyed Gettysburg the most. The battlefields there were interesting and a lot bigger than I imagined. I really liked the way we met people with the trading of state pins. The variety of food was great. This was my first time on a plane and traveling was easier than I thought.



**Parker Person  
Norris PPD**

My trip to Washington, D.C., was absolutely amazing. I had a great time visiting the Capitol and the White House. The personal tour of the Capitol was definitely a highlight. Exploring historic places like Gettysburg, Mount Vernon, and Arlington Cemetery was also a memorable experience. The museums, especially the Holocaust Museum and the Smithsonian, were incredible. The monuments at night were even more impressive than during the day.



**Audrey Stoner  
Cornhusker PPD**

My experience in Washington, D.C. was far beyond anything that I could have dreamed of. The most impactful part for me was when we were viewing the Lincoln Monument, and Trinity and I sat on the steps up to the monument to just enjoy the view. In front of us, we could see the Washington Monument you see on all the postcards: the water stretching out before us as the monument shone softly in the evening light at its end. That's why I believe that Youth Tour is so special for the kids who are blessed to be able to go on it; it's a trip of a lifetime, and something I will never forget nor never stop being thankful for those who made it all possible.

As summer draws to a close and the new school year approaches, making sure students stay safe is on everyone's mind—parents, educators, and communities alike. Whether kids are heading back to physical classrooms, walking to school, riding the bus, or diving into online learning, there are a few key areas to focus on to ensure a smooth and secure transition.

First up, road safety. If your child walks to school, it's crucial they use designated crosswalks and follow traffic signals when crossing the street. Distractions like smartphones and headphones can be risky, so it's best to avoid them while walking. Wearing bright clothing or reflective gear, especially in the early mornings or late afternoons, can make them more visible to drivers.

Speaking of drivers, it's vital to stick to speed limits, particularly in school zones. Be extra careful around schools, bus stops, and playgrounds, and always stop for

school buses when their lights are flashing and their stop signs are out.

For those who ride the bus, getting to the stop early and waiting away from the curb is important. Children should wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before approaching it, and once on board, they should remain seated, keep the aisle clear, and follow the driver's instructions.

Online safety is more crucial than ever with technology becoming a bigger part of education. Using strong passwords and keeping antivirus software up to date can help protect your child's information. It's also essential to teach them not to share personal information online and to monitor their online activities, setting appropriate boundaries.

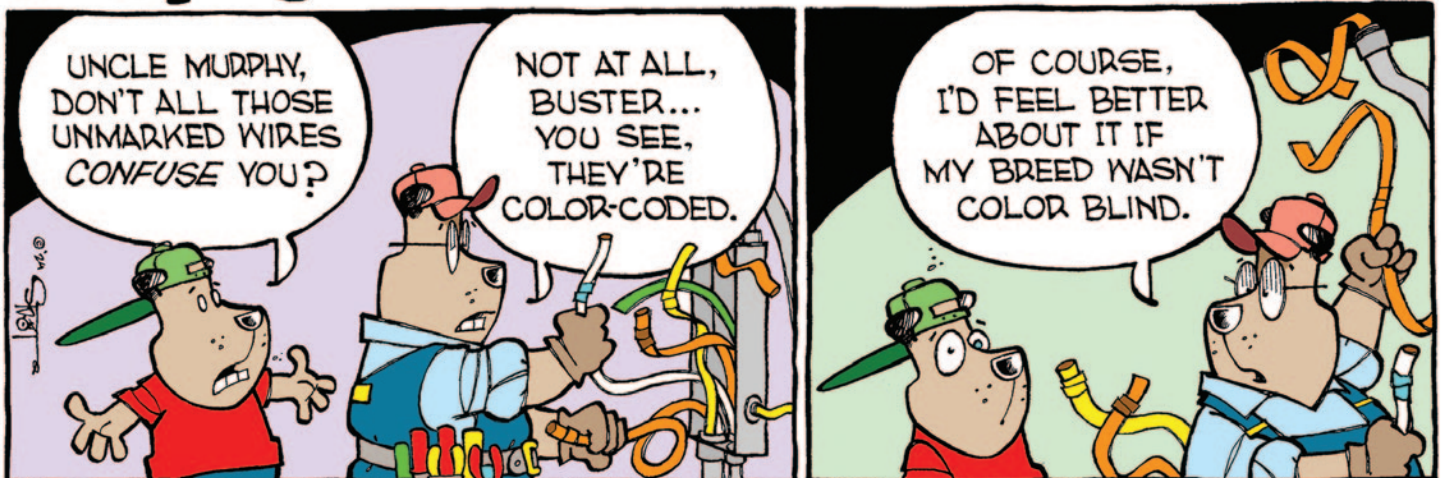
Health precautions are another key area, especially with ongoing concerns about infectious diseases. Encouraging frequent handwashing with soap and water is a simple yet

effective measure. Hand sanitizers are a good alternative when soap and water aren't available. And, if your child shows symptoms of illness, it's best to keep them home to prevent spreading germs.

Lastly, let's not forget about emotional well-being. The back-to-school transition can be stressful for some kids, so ensuring their emotional health is just as important as their physical safety. Talk to your children about their concerns and experiences, establish a consistent routine to give them a sense of stability, and encourage them to seek support from teachers, counselors, and friends.

By focusing on these areas—road safety, school bus safety, online safety, health precautions, and emotional well-being—parents, teachers, and communities can work together to create a safe and nurturing environment for students to thrive in the new school year.

## Murphy





# George William Norris

Norris was a leader of progressive and liberal causes in Congress.



Norris served five terms in the United States House of Representatives as a Republican, from 1903 until 1913, and five terms in the United States Senate, from 1913 until 1943. He served four terms as a Republican and his final term as an independent.



**BIOGRAPHY**

**Born**  
July 11, 1861  
Sandusky County, Ohio.

**Died**  
September 2, 1944  
(aged 83)  
McCook, Nebraska

**Political party**  
Republican (until 1936)  
Independent

**Spouses**  
Pluma Lashley  
(m. 1889; died 1901)  
Ellie Leonard  
(m. 1903)

**Children** 3

**Alma mater**  
Baldwin University  
Northern Indiana  
Normal School

**Profession** Lawyer

President Franklin D. Roosevelt called him "the very perfect, gentle knight of American progressive ideals."



Norris was the prime Senate supporter of the **Rural Electrification Act**, which brought electrical service to underserved rural areas across the United States. Given Norris's belief in "**public power**", no privately owned electric utilities have operated in Nebraska since the late 1940s.



Preparing for Storm Season?

**DON'T FORGET TO READY YOUR CAR**

According to the National Safety Council (NSC), every vehicle should have an emergency supply kit onboard. Kits should be checked twice a year and expired items should be replaced regularly. Emergency supply kits should include:

- Snowbrush  
Shovel  
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- Warm clothing  
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Drinking water  
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Fire extinguisher
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Safe Electricity.org Source: NSC

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# Energy Sense

by Miranda Boutelle

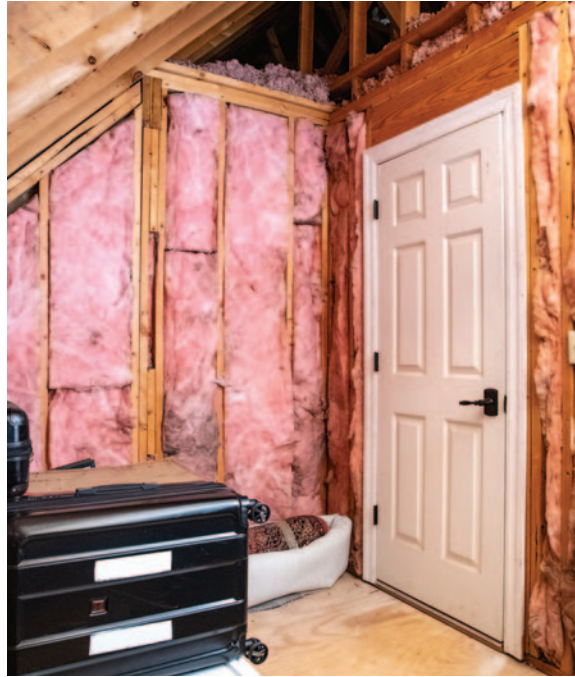
## Incentives and Rebates for Efficiency Upgrades

Tax credits and rebates can help bridge the affordability gap to higher efficiency equipment for your home, allowing you to complete energy efficiency upgrades that can lower your energy use and save you money in years to come.

First, knowing the difference between a tax credit and rebate is important. A rebate is a payment for purchasing or installing a qualified product or home improvement. Depending on how the rebate program is set up, it may be provided at the time of purchase or applied for and received after installation. Check with your rural electric utility to see if they offer rebates. Typically, the rebate is applied as a credit on your electric bill. In some cases, the rebate is provided a cash payment to those who complete eligible projects.

A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar amount that taxpayers can report on their tax documents to reduce the amount of taxes owed. You apply for a tax credit when you file your tax documents, so it typically takes longer to reap the benefits than it does with a rebate. According to EnergyStar, homeowners can qualify for up to \$3,200 annually in federal tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades. Federal tax credits are available for heating and cooling system upgrades, including heat pumps, furnaces, central air conditioners, boilers and geothermal heat pumps. Tax credits for EnergyStar-rated heat pump water heaters cover 30% of the project cost, up to \$2,000. You can also improve your home's envelope—the portion of the home that separates the inside from the outside—with tax credits for insulation, windows and skylights.

If an energy efficiency upgrade requires improving the electrical panel in your home, there's a tax credit for that, too. You can receive 30% of the cost of the panel



*You can also improve your home's envelope with tax credits for insulation. Photograph by Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources*

upgrade, up to \$600.

These federal tax credits are available through 2032. You must own the home you're upgrading, and it must be your primary residence. Federal tax credits only apply to existing homes in the United States, not new construction.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 expanded available funding for many home upgrades. The act allocated \$8.8 million for home rebate programs to be implemented at the state level, and this funding is offered in two different programs. The HOMES program allows up to \$8,000 per home for standard-income households. Higher rebates are available for low- to moderate-

income households. The HEAR program offers rebates of up to \$14,000 per home for qualified, efficient electric equipment for low- to moderate-income households.

These programs are designed to bolster existing programs and should be available in late 2024 or early 2025. Check with your rural electric utility or state office to find out if they are being offered in your state. Additional energy efficiency rebates might also be available. More than half of U.S. states require energy efficiency programs for residents, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. These programs can help people save money on their electric bills and help states meet climate goals, reduce system costs and improve the electric grid.

I have had the privilege of working in energy efficiency rebate programs for many years and have seen the benefits of these programs firsthand. Tax credit and rebate programs can make upgrades more affordable—helping people save money and improve the overall comfort of their homes.





## Make informed renewable energy decisions

We've all been there – a salesperson or online advertisement shows up promoting a product or technology that promises to save us hundreds or even thousands of dollars. However, the catch is, we need to act now or we'll miss out on the opportunity forever! Are the alarm bells going off yet?

Unfortunately, these all-too-common high-pressure sales tactics have recently made their way into the renewable energy market due to a handful of misleading contractors. While it is true that now may be a good time to take advantage of USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant funds for renewable energy projects, it is crucial to talk with your local utility first.

Your local utility will help you understand the connection process, the potential need for electrical system upgrades, and the rate appropriate for your renewable generation.

Questions to ask your utility may include:

- What is the process for safe connection?
- Has the utility worked with this vendor before?
- Will I save the money that I've been told by the salesperson?
- Are there permits and inspections required by other entities?

For ag producers and rural, small businesses that

qualify for USDA REAP grants, it is important to note:

- Grant applications should be completed and submitted prior to paying for any project. Any upfront deposits are disqualified from REAP grant funds and may result in project disqualification.
- USDA REAP grants are competitive and not guaranteed.
- USDA REAP grant funds are not available for residences. A farm or business that shares a common meter with a residence may still apply, but it is subject to decreased funding.
- USDA Rural Development is the best contact for more information on REAP grant funding.

Investment in renewable energy can be a viable acquisition for ag producers and rural, small businesses as there are additional financial incentives available. However, these other incentives are not “cash in hand” like the USDA REAP grant. Be sure to discuss these options with your financial advisor.

- Renewable Energy Investment Tax Credit: a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for 30% of qualified expenses in the installation of a renewable energy project.
- Depreciation of business investment: up to 25% of the cost of tangible property can be depreciated over a five year period using the Modified Accelerated Cost Recovery System (MACRS).

# Simple Recipes that Make School Days a Cinch

Resisting the weeknight urge to call for takeout or order delivery starts with an approachable at-home menu with recipes you can prep in an instant. Especially during back-to-school season when schedules are jam-packed with activities, easy meals you can rely on allow you and your loved ones to ease tension in the kitchen.

Simplicity is the key to putting dinner on the table in 30 minutes or less, and these Taco Salad and Taco Mac and Cheese recipes offer mealtime solutions that make cooking duty a breeze.

Macaroni and cheese is a beloved comfort food that's easy to make on busy weeknights. With just a few extra ingredients and steps, you can turn boxed mac and cheese into a filling dinner.

To make this Taco Mac and Cheese, simply prepare your favorite boxed mac and cheese according to the package instructions and stir fry the meat and vegetables together. (Hint: You can even chop vegetables the night before to make cooking the next day even easier.) Then add taco seasoning and combine for a new take on a classic dish.

Find more recipe ideas to simplify hectic back-to-school schedules at [Culinary.net](http://Culinary.net).



## Taco Salad

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans
- 1 can (15 ounces) corn
- 2 cans (14 ounces each) diced tomatoes with chilies
- 1/2 cup half-and-half or milk
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons mesquite seasoning
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- salt, to taste
- 1 lime, juice only
- 1 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 cup chopped romaine lettuce
- 2-3 cups shredded cheese
- 1 tub (16 ounces) sour cream
- crushed tortilla chips

tomatoes with juices and half-and-half. Add onion powder, garlic powder, mesquite seasoning and pepper. Season with salt, to taste. Bring to simmer.

Add lime juice; stir. Sprinkle with cilantro.

Wash and chop lettuce. Place cheese and sour cream in bowls for toppings.

On plates, top crushed tortilla chips with meat sauce, lettuce, cheese and sour cream, as desired.

In pan over medium heat, brown beef until cooked through; drain. Add black beans and corn. Stir in





## Taco Mac & Cheese

- 1 box macaroni and cheese
- 1/4 cup milk
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, diced
- 1 orange bell pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 teaspoons taco seasoning

Prepare boxed mac and cheese with milk and butter according to package instructions.

In skillet, brown ground turkey over medium heat. Add bell peppers and onion. Add taco seasoning.

Stir turkey mixture with mac and cheese to combine.

## Reader Submitted Recipes

### Crack Green Beans

- 5 cans of green beans, drained - you can substitute a similar amount of frozen green beans or fresh green beans
- 12 slices bacon, cooked and cut into pieces
- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 7 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons garlic powder

Put the drained beans in a 13" x 9" pan. Add the cooked bacon pieces. Mix the remaining ingredients (the crack sauce) and pour over the beans. Bake 40 minutes at 350 degrees. Toss and serve!

**Terri Ottmans, Nelson, Nebraska**

### Barbeque Ribs

- |                            |     |                         |
|----------------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| Pork or Beef Ribs          | 1/2 | tablespoon allspice     |
| Onion, sliced              | 1/2 | tablespoon pepper       |
| Sauce:                     | 1/2 | tablespoon chili powder |
| 2 cups tomato juice        | 1/4 | teaspoon red pepper     |
| 2 cups ketchup             | 1/4 | teaspoon dry mustard    |
| 1 1/2 tablespoons salt     | 2   | tablespoons vinegar     |
| 1/2 tablespoon celery salt | 2   | cups brown sugar        |

Stir together all of the sauce ingredients in saucepan and bring to a boil. Brown the ribs you will be using on both sides. In a large pan, use a layer of ribs topped with onions and a layer of sauce, repeat a layer of ribs, onions and the rest of the sauce. Put in the oven for 6 hours at 225 degrees. Skim off fat and enjoy.

**Yvonne Cooper, Orchard, Nebraska**

### Banana Split Dessert

- |                                 |       |                          |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| 3 cups graham cracker crumbs    | 1     | cup real chocolate chips |
| 1/2 cup oleo                    | 1/2   | cup oleo                 |
| 3 bananas                       | 2     | cups powdered sugar      |
| 1/2 gallon strawberry ice cream | 1 1/2 | cups evaporated milk     |
| 1 cup walnuts (crushed)         | 1     | teaspoon vanilla         |
|                                 | 1     | tub (9 oz) Cool Whip     |

Combine graham crackers and 1/2 cup oleo and press into an 11 x 15 pan. Slice bananas over the crust, then slice the ice cream 1/2" thick over the bananas. Sprinkle the nuts over the ice cream and freeze until firm. Melt 1 cup chocolate chips in 1/2 cup oleo. Add the 2 cups powdered sugar and 1 1/2 cups evaporated milk. Cook until smooth & thick, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, add vanilla. Let cool then pour over ice cream and freeze. Then top with Cool Whip and sprinkle with additional graham cracker crumbs. Freeze again. Enjoy!

**Nancy Kort, Blue Hills, Nebraska**

## Wanted: Favorite Thanksgiving Recipes The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Send us your favorite Thanksgiving meal recipes. Be sure to include a mailing address for payment purposes and a phone number in case we need to contact you. Recipes will not be returned and not all recipes will be used.

**Mail:** Nebraska Rural Electric Association, *Nebraska Magazine* Recipes, P.O. Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501 • **E-mail:** Tina Schweitzer at [tschweitzer@nrea.org](mailto:tschweitzer@nrea.org).

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# DON'T BE MISLED

Contact your local public power utility *before* installing wind or solar energy generation for your home or business.

## We're Ready to Help Walk You Through the Process

You've likely seen lots of ads about installing backyard wind or rooftop solar to your home, but don't be misled by claims that you will save big on your energy bill. The first thing you should do is reach out to your trusted utility company.

### Your local public power utility will:

- 1 Discuss available options.
- 2 Determine if you're a good fit.
- 3 Discuss real cost and returns.
- 4 Discuss monthly rates.
- 5 Share tax credit and incentive information.
- 6 Help you find an installer.

Let's talk you through everything you need to know. Contact us today: **(877) ASK-NPPD**

## The Do's and Don'ts of Wind and Solar Installation

- ✓ **DO evaluate** your home energy usage and determine if you can reduce it.
- ✓ **DO contact** your local electric utility to discuss rates, costs, ROI and best practices.
- ✓ **DO have your roof inspected** to see if it can support solar panels.
- ✓ **DO check local ordinances** to see if you can install solar or small wind generation.
- ✓ **DO get multiple price quotes** and compare warranties offered.
- ✗ **DON'T give in** to high-pressure sales tactics.
- ✗ **DON'T assume** your home is a good fit for solar or wind.
- ✗ **DON'T believe the misleading claims** of future utility rate increases.
- ✗ **DON'T believe the over-exaggerated** promises of cost savings and benefits.
- ✗ **DON'T believe the salesperson** if they state they are working on behalf of your local utility.



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