

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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Whetstone Valley Electric's Rate Increase in 2025

What You Need to Know



Dave Page
General Manager

Whetstone Valley Electric's Board of Directors recently met to discuss the outcome of a comprehensive cost-of-service and rate study, which has prompted the announcement of an impending increase in electricity rates for the coming year. This decision, while challenging, is driven by a projected revenue shortfall for 2025, primarily due to expected increases in wholesale power, capital expenses and operational costs. As we navigate these financial realities, we aim to provide our members with transparency and understanding regarding the changes.

Understanding the Reasons Behind the Rate Increase

Increased Power Supply Costs

One of the most significant factors influencing the rate increase is the anticipated rise in wholesale power costs. Approximately 53 percent of Whetstone Valley Electric's expenditures are dedicated to purchasing power. Consequently, when our power suppliers raise their rates, the impact is substantial. Our suppliers have already indicated their plans to increase rates for wholesale electricity, directly affecting our cost structure and necessitating adjustments to maintain our financial stability.

Increased Capital Costs

The cost of materials and equipment has seen a dramatic rise since 2020. For instance, the prices of essential items such as transformers, poles, and enclosures have nearly doubled in less than four years. To ensure the reliability of our services, we must continue with our system upgrade and replacement programs, which come with significant costs. These capital investments

are crucial for maintaining the quality and dependability of the electricity supply to our members.

Increase in Operating Costs

Beyond capital expenditures, our operational costs have also risen. Everyday expenses, from postage to printing, software to billing, have all experienced significant price increases. These operational costs are vital for supporting our members and ensuring smooth, uninterrupted service. As these expenses rise, they contribute to the overall need for a rate adjustment to sustain our operations.

Increased Cost of Borrowing

Since 2020, interest rates have surged by more than 100 percent, adding another layer of financial pressure. Given that our annual capital budget is projected to exceed \$1.5 million in 2025, the increased cost of borrowing significantly impacts our financial planning. These higher interest rates translate into greater expenses for funding necessary projects and maintaining our infrastructure.

Impact on Rate Classes

Rate adjustments will vary across different rate classes based on the cost of providing service to each class. This means that the increase will not be uniform for all customers but tailored to reflect the specific costs associated with delivering electricity to various consumer groups. Our long-range financial forecast also indicates that modest rate increases will be necessary in future years to continue addressing these ongoing cost pressures.

Whetstone Valley Electric's Commitment to Transparency

Delivering news of a rate increase is never easy, and we understand the concerns it may raise among our members. However, Whetstone Valley Electric is committed to being as transparent as possible throughout this process. We regret that we cannot provide more specific details at this time, but we are dedicated to keeping our members informed. Detailed

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

**WHETSTONE VALLEY
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Dave Page - davep@whetstone.coop

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Rate Increase, Continued

information regarding the new rates and how they will affect your electric bill will be shared in future editions of this newsletter.

A Shared Challenge

Whetstone Valley Electric is not alone in facing these financial pressures. Utilities across the region and the country are encountering similar challenges due to rising costs. By proactively addressing these issues, we aim to ensure the continued reliability and quality of our services.

For more detailed information and updates, please stay tuned to our newsletter. We are here to address any questions or concerns you may have and appreciate your continued trust in Whetstone Valley Electric.

By addressing these necessary adjustments now, we are investing in a stable and reliable energy future for all our members. Thank you for your understanding and continued support.



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WHEN THUNDER ROARS, GO INDOORS

Each year in the United States, there are about 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes and about 300 people struck by lightning. Of those struck, about 30 people are killed and others suffer lifelong disabilities. Most of these tragedies can be prevented. When thunderstorms threaten, get inside a building with plumbing and electricity, or a hard-topped metal vehicle!

The National Weather Service collects information on weather-related deaths to learn how to prevent these tragedies. Many lightning victims say they were “caught” outside in the storm and couldn’t get to a safe place. Other victims simply waited too long before seeking shelter. With proper planning, similar tragedies can be avoided.

Some people were struck because they went back outside too soon. Stay inside a safe building or vehicle for at least 30 minutes after you hear the last thunder. While 30 minutes may seem like a long time, it is necessary to be safe.

Finally, some victims were struck inside homes or buildings while they were using electrical equipment or corded phones. Others were in contact with plumbing, outside doors, or window frames. Avoid contact with these electrical conductors when a thunderstorm is nearby.

AVOID THE LIGHTNING THREAT

- **Have a lightning safety plan.** Know where you’ll go for safety and ensure you’ll have enough time to get there.
- **Postpone activities.** Consider postponing activities if thunderstorms are forecasted.
- **Monitor the weather.** Once outside, look for signs of a developing or approaching thunderstorm such as towering clouds, darkening skies, or flashes of lightning.

- **Get to a safe place.** If you hear thunder, even a distant rumble, seek safety immediately. Fully enclosed buildings with wiring and plumbing are best. A hard-topped metal vehicle with the windows closed is also safe. Stay inside until 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder. Sheds, picnic shelters, tents or covered porches do NOT protect you from lightning.
- **If you hear thunder, don’t use a corded phone except in an emergency.** Cordless phones and cell phones are safe to use.
- **Keep away from electrical equipment and plumbing.** Lightning can travel through the wiring and plumbing if your building is struck. Don’t take a bath or shower, or wash dishes during a storm.

Source: National Weather Service



Power Line Safety “Don’t Fly Kites Close to Power Lines”

Lillee Pannell, Age 11

Lillee Pannell cautions kite flyers to be careful around power lines. Great advice, Lillee! Hobie’s parents are Scottie and Kimberly Pannell, members of Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you’ll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

Summertime SWEETS

SUMMER FRUIT TART

Ingredients:

1 refrigerated pie crust
1 egg white, lightly beaten
1/3 cup sugar
2 tbsps. cornstarch
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 tsp. ginger
2 cups sliced peeled peaches,
(about 3 peaches)
1 cup blueberries
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

Method

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Prepare crust as directed on package. Place on foil-lined 12-inch pizza pan. If necessary, press out any folds or creases. Brush crust with about 1/2 of the beaten egg white. Mix sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon and ginger in medium bowl. Add fruit and vanilla; toss gently. Spoon into center of crust, spreading to within 2 inches of edges. Fold 2-inch edge of crust up over fruit, pleating or folding crust as needed. Brush crust with remaining egg white. Bake 20 minutes or until crust is golden brown. Cool slightly before serving.

McCormick

RHUBARB PIE

Crust

1-2 cups flour
1/2 stick butter or margarine
1/4 cup water

Add ingredients and knead to complete a pie crust. Amounts will vary due to humidity. Knead dough into pie pan and poke holes into the bottom as needed. You may make creative edges as you wish, however it is not necessary.

Pie

3 tbsps. butter or margarine
1 cup sugar
3 eggs, separated
2 tbsps. flour
1/8 tsp. salt
2 1/2 cups rhubarb
Smucker's Caramel Sundae
Syrup

Soften butter or margarine and stir together with the sugar, egg yolks, flour and salt. Beat egg whites until stiff. Add rhubarb and fold in the egg whites. Add the filling to the 8-inch unbaked pie crust. You may add a drizzle of Smucker's sundae syrup for additional flavoring before baking. Bake in oven set at 400 degrees until golden brown. You may also add more Caramel syrup to pie after baking for ultimate effect.

**Lisa Soukup (Kummer)
Tea, S.D.**

PEACH DELIGHT

Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter, melted
1 3/4 cups flour
Pinch of salt
2 tbsps. sugar
2 cups water
2 cups sugar
4 tbsps. cornstarch
3 oz. package peach jello
1 tbsp. butter
10 fresh peaches

Method

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine butter, flour, salt and 2 tbsps. sugar. Mix and pat in 9x13 inch pan which has been sprayed with Pam. Bake for 15 minutes. Let cool when done baking. Combine 2 cups sugar and 2 cups water. Whisk in 4 tbsps. cornstarch until smooth. Cook until thickened in the microwave – stirring often. Remove from microwave and add 1 tbsp. butter and package of peach jello (do not add any water). Stir until dissolved and let cool. While cooling, dip fresh peaches in hot water and plunge in cold water bath. Remove skins and pits. Place back in cold water until all peaches are peeled. Drain peaches, slice into bite size pieces and mix into cooled peach glaze. Carefully pour the glaze over the crust and chill until firmly set. May be served with whip cream. You can substitute strawberry jello and sliced strawberries in place of the peaches. This makes a delicious cool summer dessert.

**Shirley Fletcher
Rapid City, S.D.**

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Federal Tax Credits, Incentives and Rebates for Efficiency Upgrades



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: How do I use federal tax credits and rebates to upgrade my home?

A: 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 electric cooperative 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 ENERGY STAR®, 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 ENERGY STAR®-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 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 electric cooperative 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.

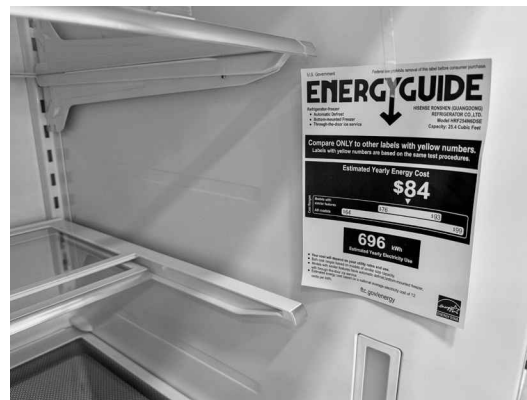




Photo credit: Jackie Jensen

LISA LOCKHART

Winning at What She Loves While Enjoying a Beloved American Pastime

Jocelyn Johnson

jocelyn.johnson@sirea.coop

It's been her hustle and passion since she was six years old, and it's made her one of the best competitors in the world. South Dakota's Lisa Lockhart is an elite barrel racer from Oelrichs, S.D., and in her own words, "There is no off-season."

Dandy was the little Shetland pony that gave Lockhart her start on her family farm in Montana. She recounted her memories of racing him around her parent's yard and signing up for local rodeo events with him.

"I was definitely a horse-crazy little girl from the get-go," Lockhart said. "My pony was my babysitter in the

front yard."

Even though opportunities were limited in the early '70s when she started rodeo, Lockhart became a success story through dedication, lots of practice and the help of her family. She credits her sisters, Debbie and Angela, for being the pioneers of barrel racing in her own family as well as her husband, Grady, for his ongoing support.

"We enjoy it as a family," Lockhart said. "Grady was a calf roper, and we actually met at a rodeo. We're best friends and have like interests... it takes a village, and I am thankful for the village. It's definitely a team effort. I couldn't do it by myself."

Along with their kids – Alyssa,

Thane and Cade – the Lockharts have enjoyed rodeo and bonded over the experiences, conversations and goals they share.

Lockhart trains and buys her competitive horses but explains that having history and longevity with a horse impacts the level of success she has with them. She noted that having a personal bond with each horse not only impacts their performance but is also something she enjoys.

"They are such unique individuals, just like humans are," Lockhart explained. "Being able to tap into that personal relationship with each horse has an impact on our level of success. I love these equine athletes."

She's pocketed a handful of reserve world championships, three American Rodeo championships and more than \$3.1 million in career earnings; but Lockhart's current goal is to make it to her 18th consecutive National Finals Rodeo.

"I have a passion for the horses and am a competitive person by nature," Lockhart noted. "Your horsepower dictates where you go and how successful you may be. I'm always going to ride horses and I'm always going to train horses – I love it, but the level of competition I can attain depends on my horsepower. Sometimes, you got to go through a lot of horses to try and find the next champion."

Lockhart expounded that success is earned through training and passion. The horse matters, but the dedication of the racer will dictate how far they go.

When asked what her advice would be to young racers, Lockhart stated: "I think there is a lot of opportunity out there for people to learn – with technology. Educate yourself and spend the time practicing it. Knowledge is at your fingertips. Just like everything in life, if you want it, you have to work for it. It's not handed to you."



CRISP BREEZES AND CORN MAZES

A broken-down 1950s-style Chevrolet pickup welcomes visitors to the Back Forty Beef corn maze. *Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.*

Celebrating Autumn on the Family Farm

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

The first signs of autumn sweep across the plains as daylight dwindles and treetops wither into amber. For some, the nostalgia of fall is evoked by the first crisp breeze at a football game or the taste of a freshly picked apple from the orchard. But for Clint and Kelly Brandlee, Lake Region Electric members living in rural Pierpont, the magic of the harvest season begins with the opening of their family-owned corn maze.

The Brandlee family homesteaded their land in 1886 on the western edge of the Coteau Hills, an area characterized by rolling hills, fertile ground and native pastures. With deep roots extending through five generations of ranching and farming, Clint and Kelly's daughters, Jaycee

and Kylie, represent the sixth generation on the farm.

Over the years, the family has maintained their commitment to traditional farming values while embracing innovation. In 2020, Clint and Kelly

transformed their operation into a direct-to-consumer agriculture business, launching Back Forty Beef, LLC. Their new venture allowed them to provide locally raised beef at a fair price while giving customers the opportunity to see



Back Forty Beef hosts a number of family-friendly events including duck races. *Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.*

how their animals and crops are raised, from farm to table.

“During the pandemic, people were looking for a direct source for their beef, and we wanted to provide that,” Kelly said.

Through Back Forty Beef, Clint and Kelly supplied their area with local beef and discovered new ways to engage their community. Just last year, the two started an annual tradition by planting a 12-acre, agriculture-themed corn maze as a way to bring something new to their part of the state. In just a year, the maze has become a hub for families to come together and celebrate agriculture and the harvest season.

“We wanted to do something really fun and get families outside in northeastern South Dakota during the fall, and what better way to do that than through a corn maze?” Kelly said. “It’s a way for us to share our passion for agriculture and our story. As a population, we are getting two to three generations removed from the farm. There is less of a connection to rural life, so any time we can provide people an opportunity to get out onto the farm and learn something, that benefits the whole of agriculture.”

This fall, Clint and Kelly are again inviting their surrounding communities to visit their homestead and explore this year’s newly designed maze. The maze is set to be open to the public every weekend after



A bird's-eye view of last year's Back Forty Beef corn maze. Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.

Labor Day to the last week of October. The theme is pollinators, featuring images of a corn cob, flower, bee and barn. Several twists and turns will be embellished with fun facts about pollinators and crop production in South Dakota, making it an educational experience for all ages.

Along with the corn maze, Back Forty Beef is planning to incorporate other family-friendly activities, including duck races, farm animal exhibits, farm basketball, a straw mountain slide and more. Back Forty Beef will also host a farm store where customers can buy everything from local pumpkins to their homegrown beef.

Other local businesses are also joining

in the fun. A different local food truck is scheduled to attend each weekend during the open season, and local businesses are offering small discounts and deals for participants who complete the maze.

“There are checkpoints in the maze, and each checkpoint is equipped with a fun fact and a partnered local business,” said Kelly. “For example, Dairy Queen is offering a buy one, get one free offer for those who hole punch their card at their checkpoint and read the fun fact about pollinators and production agriculture.”

Clint and Kelly’s efforts to engage the community have resulted in a community that engages with their business. Like many other direct-to-consumer operations, Back Forty Beef has its own website and online shop for its brand of beef, dairy products, merchandise and even hand-poured tallow candles. The Brandlee family has also found success through their beef subscription club where boxes are regularly delivered to the doorsteps of customers every month. Whether it’s through the corn maze or the subscription beef boxes, Kelly said the local community has fully embraced Back Forty Beef.

“We had a lot of people who attended that had never done a corn maze before, so a lot of people were excited to do something new and different,” said Kelly. “We had a great turnout to our maze last year, and that’s why we decided to do it again.”



Owner-operators of Back Forty Beef, Kelly and Clint Brandlee and their two daughters, Jaycee and Kylie. Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.

Fall Energy-Saving Tips

The following tips will save money and energy while staying comfortable during the cool fall and cold winter months. Many of these tips can be used on a daily basis to increase your savings; others are simple and inexpensive actions you can take to ensure maximum savings through the winter.

If you haven't already, conduct an energy assessment to determine where to save the most, and consider making a larger investment for long-term energy savings.

Also check out no-cost and low-cost tips to save energy during the spring and summer.

Take Advantage of Heat from the Sun

- Open curtains on the south-facing windows during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat the home and close them at night to reduce the chill from cold windows.
- Be certain to plant deciduous trees on the south facing side of the home, especially in proximity to windows. They will let the light and warmth in the windows during the winter and will shade the windows in the summer.

Cover Drafty Windows

- Use a heavy-duty, clear plastic sheet on a frame or tape clear plastic film to the inside of window frames during the cold winter months. Make sure the plastic is sealed tightly to the frame to help reduce infiltration.
- Install tight-fitting, insulating drapes or shades on windows that feel drafty after weatherizing.

- Find out about other window treatments and coverings that can improve energy efficiency.

Adjust the Temperature

- When you are home and awake, set the thermostat as low as is comfortable.
- When you are asleep or out of the house, turn the thermostat back to save as much as 10% a year on your heating and cooling bills. A smart or programmable thermostat can make it easy to set back your temperature. But make sure the temperature is comfortable for pets!
- If you have a heat pump, maintain a moderate setting or use a programmable thermostat specially designed for use with heat pumps.

Find and Seal Leaks

- Seal air leaks around utility cut-throughs for pipes ("plumbing penetrations"), gaps around chimneys and recessed lights in insulated ceilings, and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.
- Add caulk or weatherstripping to seal air leaks around leaky doors and windows.

Maintain Your Heating Systems

- Schedule routine service for home heating systems.
- Replace furnace and heat pump filters once a month or as needed. Find out more about maintaining furnaces or boilers and heat pumps.
- Regularly clean the flue vent of wood and pellet burning

heaters and clean the inside of the appliance with a wire brush periodically to ensure that it is heating efficiently. Find other maintenance recommendations for wood- and pellet-burning appliances.

Reduce Heat Loss from the Fireplace

- Keep the fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning. Keeping the damper open is like keeping a window wide open during the winter; it allows warm air to go right up the chimney.
- When using the fireplace, reduce heat loss by opening dampers in the bottom of the firebox (if provided) or open the nearest window slightly—approximately 1 inch—and close doors leading into the room. Lower the thermostat setting to between 50° and 55°F.
- If the fireplace is never used, plug and seal the chimney flue.
- Install tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system that blows warmed air back into the room.
- Check the seal on the fireplace flue damper and make it as snug as possible.
- Purchase grates made of C-shaped metal tubes to draw cool room air into the fireplace and circulate warm air back into the room.
- Add caulking around the fireplace hearth. Find out more techniques to improve your fireplace or wood-burning appliance's efficiency. Learn tips for safe and efficient fireplace installation and wood burning.

Lower Water Heating Costs

- Keep the temperature of the water heater to the warm setting (120°F). This will not only save energy, but it will also help avoid scalding.

Source: www.energy.gov

Capital Credits

DO YOU HAVE CAPITAL CREDIT MONEY COMING TO YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

WE ARE LOOKING FOR PAST CONSUMERS!

The following list contains the names and last known addresses of former Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative members, whose capital credit checks were returned to us. Please review the list and contact us if you are listed or know the contact information for anyone listed.

Call 605-432-5331 or 800-568-6631

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Adams, Katherine Elk River, MN | Stillwater, MN | Lowell, Charles Sioux Falls, SD | Peever, SD |
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| Cilliers, Johan Holyoke, CO | Ketter, Lucinda Milbank, SD | Mielitz, Douglas Big Stone City, SD | Tucholkes Homestead Farm Sioux Falls, SD |
| Clarey, Toni Carthage, SD | King, Darlene Sisseton, SD | Montreal, Rosanna Sisseton, SD | Tucholke, David Sioux Falls, SD |
| Cooper, Daniel Agency Village, SD | Krueger, Nathan Elk River, MN | Musch, Tracy Milbank, SD | VNVRO/ Mike Mitchell N Sioux City, SD |
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| Derby, Roman Peever, SD | Lafontaine, Marsha Sisseton, SD | Pauli, Sue Sioux Falls, SD | Wadsworth, Michael Big Lake, MN |
| Donnell, Vernal Wahpeton, ND | Langhus, Pat Janesville, WI | Poppen, Carolyn Spirit Lake, ID | Weigand, Allen Corona, SD |
| Dorsch, Michael Sheridan, WY | Lapp, John Great Plains, MT | Prins, Maynard Summit, SD | Wietzema, Robert Watertown, SD |
| Fisher, George Roanoke, IN | Lemon, Marc Ocala, FL | Redwing, Norman Sisseton, SD | Zamarron, Margarita Milbank, SD |
| Giere, David Dodge Center, MN | Linn Properties Savage, MN | Reil, Loren Corona, SD | Zimmerman, Karen Wilmot, SD |
| Gray, Gary | Lohnes, Tabetha Shakopee, MN | Robertson, Georgia | |



RODEO CHAMPIONS

Short Go Finalists Win Touchstone Energy Shirts During the State Competition in Ft. Pierre

Jocelyn Johnson
jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop

South Dakota's electric cooperatives united in celebrating rodeo on June 15 during the state high school competition in Ft. Pierre, S.D. Cowboys and cowgirls competed in events that mimic the daily chores of a typical rancher, racing to place in the Short Go.

Short Go state finalists earned the coveted Touchstone Energy shirts that mark them as the top competitors of a beloved rural pastime. After a season of competing, the visual representation of wearing this shirt is

more than a fashion statement. "These shirts are almost like a trophy," said Kylee Ellerton, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative in Custer, S.D. "It's something you can keep and look back on to remember." Ellerton earned the Short Go shirt, sponsored by Touchstone Energy electric cooperatives. She won 10th place in goat tying at state. "My grandpa and dad grew up rodeoing," Ellerton said. "So, I got started in rodeo pretty young." High school rodeo events began in 1949, and by 1951, South Dakota was among five states that established the National High School Rodeo

Mataya Ward keeps her eyes on a goat she tied during the Short Go. Photo credit: Charles Minor

Association. It's a shared heritage for many in the state, and electric cooperatives have a 22-year history of celebrating rodeo by sponsoring the Touchstone Energy Short Go Shirt program. More than \$150,000 has been given to this program since 2002, and these funds are used to honor the contestants who make it to the Short Go round



Photo credit: Charles Minor



Kailey Deknikker rounds a Touchstone Energy barrel during the state Short Go in barrel racing. Photo credit: 4-C Photography

of the state finals competition in their respective events.

Kailey Deknikker, member of Southeastern Electric Cooperative in Lennox, S.D., has a passion for rodeo and wishes to go as far as she can in the sport. She will be attending Mitchell Technical College this fall for business management and joining

the college rodeo team in barrel racing and pole bending.

“The shirt shows that your hard work paid off,” explained Deknikker after placing in the Short Go and winning a Touchstone Energy Short Go shirt. “It shows your accomplishment.”

Decknikker placed 7th in barrel

racing after running a time of 18.246 seconds in the 1st Go, 17.802 seconds in the 2nd Go, and 18.078 seconds in the Short Go.

Leighton Sander, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative in Custer, S.D., won 6th place in the bareback riding Short Go competition. Sander works with his family on a cow/calf operation outside of Custer, S.D.

“There’s some pride that goes with wearing that Short Go shirt,” said Sander. “You go to a rodeo and see a couple people wearing those shirts outside of the high school season, and you think, ‘they must have been good enough to make it to the Short Go – I better watch that guy.’”

Sander explained that his draw to one of the toughest events in the sport of rodeo is the adrenaline rush. He hopes to use his bareback riding skills in future horse training efforts while noting, “being able to stick to a horse is important.”

“I don’t know how to explain it,” Sander said. “It’s super scary before you start, but once you climb into that chute and they open up the gate, it’s like eating your favorite cake.”



Finalists wear Touchstone Energy Short Go shirts. Photo credit: Charles Minor



FROM FARM TO LODGE

A group of hunters showcase their success after a day of hunting on Larry Schecher's land. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

Prairie Meadows Lodge Fuels Economy and Conservation

Frank Turner

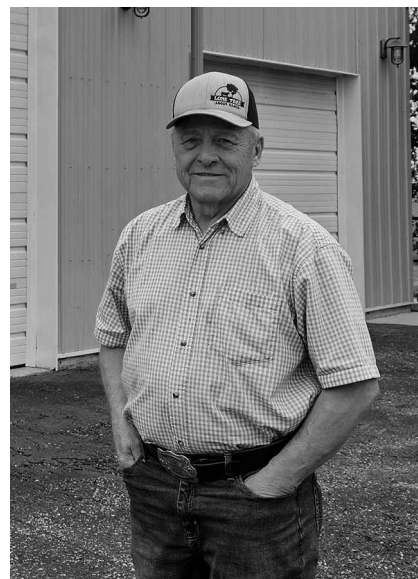
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When a pheasant hunter travels to South Dakota, dons an orange hunting vest and steps out onto one of the state's many acres of pristine hunting land, they are doing more than just participating in local recreation and tradition; they are bolstering one of South Dakota's cornerstone industries. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks estimates that hunting alone contributes \$683 million to the

state's economy, far exceeding the contributions from fishing and state park visitation.

Many producers across the state are enthusiastically welcoming these outdoor recreationists, including landowner Larry Schecher. Schecher is a fourth-generation, lifelong rancher, farmer and member of Grand Electric in Bison, S.D., who recently made the savvy decision to develop a private hunting lodge and accommodate hunters on his land.

So what prompted the lodge? In 2019, Schecher expanded his



Fourth-generation farmer and rancher Larry Schecher. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

operation, taking the usual steps to purchase land that he had previously been leasing. The land came with one interesting perk: an outbuilding that the previous owner had used to repair and rebuild classic cars. The outbuilding became the perfect avenue for him to not only expand his operation physically but also add an entirely new revenue stream by transforming the old garage into Prairie Meadows Lodge.

“It wasn’t insulated or anything, but it was a nice enough building,” said Schecher. “We just took it to the next level and remodeled the entire interior.”

What started as a car garage quickly became a private hunting lodge on Schecher’s land, equipped with a complete kitchen and living space, two bedrooms with four beds each, an electric fireplace, and even a washer and dryer.

Yet, accommodations are only half the equation. Prairie Meadows Lodge hunts are self-guided, meaning hunters can explore the plentiful food plots, thick shelter belts and acres of brush that adorn Schecher’s land and plan their hunt accordingly. The producer estimates that he owns more than 300 acres of premier hunting land for Prairie Meadows Lodge hunts, scattered across almost 3,000 acres of farm and ranch land. The land, he said, harbors a healthy population of wild pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and partridge.

Since starting Prairie Meadows Lodge, Schecher said he and his son, Bradley, have begun planting food plots specifically to promote healthy habitat and food sources for the wild birds on their land.

“We planted a few food plots this year with a ‘pheasant mix,’” said Schecher. “The mix includes



Prairie Meadow's Lodge welcomes pheasant hunters from across the nation. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

flowering species that attract insects and milo, millet and sunflowers to produce seeds for the birds to eat. We plan to continue adding more food plots in the future to enhance our bird numbers, which have been steadily increasing over the past few years. It’s been great for being in the business of letting people hunt.”

A year after purchasing the outbuilding and preparing the land, Schecher invited hunters to test the newly renovated operation. The launch was a success, and Prairie Meadows Lodge has since hosted hunters from all over the country, including those from surrounding states and as far away as Washington, Texas and Pennsylvania, many of whom are repeat customers.

“Adding wildlife into the equation has just become another facet of being a producer,” said Schecher. “In many ways, it’s like adding another crop to the mix. It gives an incentive to create more habitat and include more conservation techniques into my operation, enhancing the ability of the wildlife to thrive and prosper.”



In 2019, Larry Schecher renovated an old garage into Prairie Meadows Lodge, a private hunting lodge for unguided pheasant hunts. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

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Photo Credit: SDStateFair

SEPT. 20-22 **South Dakota Festival of Books**

Various Locations
Brookings, SD
605-688-6113

SEPT. 27-29 **Coal Springs Threshing Bee and Antique Show**

Meadow, SD
605-788-2299

OCT. 5-6 **Run Crazy Horse Marathons**

Crazy Horse
605-390-6137
www.runcrazyhorse.com

OCT. 5-6 **Magic Needlers Quilt Show**

Codington County Extension Complex
Watertown, SD
605-881-3273

OCT. 5-6 **The Black Market**

Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds
Expo Building
Sioux Falls, SD
605-332-6004

OCT. 6 **Giant Pumpkin Festival**

Bentley Memorial Building
Bison, SD
Enter Pumpkins by 11:30 a.m.
605-244-5475

OCT. 10-11 **Rural Women Conference**

The Lodge of Deadwood
Deadwood, SD
SouthDakotaWomenInAg.com

AUG. 28-SEPT. 2 **South Dakota State Fair**

7 a.m.-8 p.m.
Huron, SD
www.SDStateFair.com

SEPT. 1 **Studebaker Car Show**

10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Custer, SD
605-673-2244

SEPT. 2 **Hidewood Valley Steam Threshing Show**

Starts at 1 p.m.
Clear Lake, SD
605-881-8405

SEPT. 6-7 **Ribs, Rods & Rock n' Roll**

Vermillion, SD
www.sdbbq.us

SEPT. 8 **Homesteader Day**

1-4 p.m.
Valley Springs, SD
Beaver Creek Nature Area

SEPT. 12-15 **South Dakota Film Festival**

Downtown Capitol Theatre
Aberdeen, SD
605-226-5494

SEPT. 13-14 **Black Hills Polkapalooza**

Each Night at 4-10 p.m.
Palmer Gulch
Hill City, SD
605-574-2525

SEPT. 13-14 **Holiday Arts Fall Craft Show**

Davison County Fairgrounds
Mitchell, SD
605-359-2049

SEPT. 14-15 **2024 Kuchen & Harvest Festival**

Delmont, SD
605-928-3792

SEPT. 17 **EV Expo**

W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds
Sioux Falls, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

Note: Please make sure to call ahead to verify the event is still being held.