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The Current

A Publication of Cotton Electric Cooperative Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

“The Current - Informing Our Members Since 1957”

VOLUME 67

March 8, 2024

NUMBER 7

Unruly trees and power lines: We're on it

Cotton Electric Cooperative strives to provide safe and reliable power service to its members. One way this goal is achieved is through the cooperative's Vegetation Management (VM) department. The VM department is a proactive effort to ensure quality power delivery. Preventive vegetation management is valuable to members from a service and an economic perspective. When you see us out trimming trees, know that we are doing so to keep you safe and prevent service issues.

Although most trees do not present a problem, some of them grow into or crowd power lines or other electric utility equipment. When trees or other greenery becomes too close for comfort, we have to address it because overgrowth can interfere with power distribution and create other potential safety hazards to the public.

Power lines can give off a spark or arc that may land on a nearby branch. Additionally, the lights in your house may flicker when tree branches brush power lines during high winds. Stormy weather can also cause limbs to break off and land on lines.

Clear power lines make it easier and safer for lineworkers to access power lines and other electrical equipment to fix problems that may occur. When clearing around lines, we make sure proper pruning techniques are used to preserve tree health as much as possible. Pruning is the first line of defense against unruly trees and other greenery, although sometimes a tree must be removed. This is a last resort, but some scenarios may require it, such as: when a fast-growing tree is located directly under a power line or for trees that are leaning, in decline, or cracked or split.

After trees are cleared, Cotton Electric VM crews return to the area at regularly scheduled intervals to apply a specially formulated herbicide that will prevent tree growth without causing harm to grasses. Spraying is done only when the weather is right for safe application during the growing season, which begins in mid-May.

Cotton Electric VM employees make every effort to contact land- and homeowners in person as they move into an area. If members are not home, an effort will be made to contact owners by phone and, in some cases, a bright-colored door hanger will be left at the house or tied to a gate post. Updated member contact information helps co-op employees with this process. Give us a call at 580-875-3351 to make sure we have the correct contact information on record, so we can keep you up to date.

When hiring someone to trim trees on your property, know that most tree-care workers are not qualified to work around energized power lines. By law, only OSHA-certified utility line clearance workers are allowed to work on trees or branches within 10 feet of a power line.

As always, Cotton Electric's VM crew is looking for land- and homeowners in need of free, untreated wood chips. Since the wood chips are untreated, it is not recommended to use them next to a structure.

Landowners looking for material to help with erosion problems may want to contact Cotton Electric, too. With the co-op's skid steer, the VM crew can deliver stumps and other debris too large to chip or mulch.

Chips and large debris will be delivered to members nearest the day's work location who can be reached by phone. While we do our best to deliver to everyone, we cannot guarantee a member will receive wood chips at any particular time.

Call our offices at 580-875-3351 or email info@cottonelectric.com to have your name added to the list of members willing to take wood chips. For more information about electrical safety, visit www.cottonelectric.com/safety or www.safeelectricity.com.



WHY DOES YOUR POWER PROVIDER TRIM TREES?

Although most trees do not present a problem, some of them grow into or crowd power lines, poles or other utility equipment and cause service issues. Unruly and overgrown trees can:

-  Cause outages.
-  Create fire hazards.
-  Break off and land on power lines.
-  Cause lights to flicker during high winds.
-  Get weighed down with ice and cause issues.

Proper pruning techniques are used to preserve tree health, although sometimes a tree must be removed. This is a last resort, but it can be necessary if there are:

-  Fast-growing trees directly under power lines.
-  Trees that are leaning into lines.
-  Trees that are declining, cracked or split.

Unobstructed power lines make it easier and safer for utility crews to repair or service lines.

 Power companies trim trees to better serve you.

Learn more at: SafeElectricity.org



Before and after photos of Cotton Electric's Vegetation Management crew trimming trees next to power lines. Photos by Carli Eubank.

Power Cost Adjustment Calculated

The power cost adjustment now being applied to bills mailed after March 1, 2024, is \$0.00458 per kWh.

On a member's average bill of 1,300 kilowatt hours (kWh), this will amount to a charge of \$5.95 on the March bill.

February 2024 Temperature Extremes

Day	High	Low	Avg.	Day	High	Low	Avg.
1	73	44	59	16	52	33	43
2	64	40	52	17	37	23	30
3	66	48	57	18	54	21	38
4	57	48	53	19	70	34	52
5	62	36	49	20	79	31	55
6	60	30	45	21	83	36	60
7	66	44	55	22	74	45	60
8	71	43	57	23	71	38	55
9	65	37	51	24	75	31	53
10	52	40	46	25	79	39	59
11	44	33	39	26	89	38	64
12	52	30	41	27	81	53	67
13	63	27	45	28	47	31	39
14	69	31	50	29	43	27	35
15	66	37	52				

Source: srh.noaa.gov/oun/

Average Daily High: 64 Average Daily Low: 36

Did You Know?

2024 Energy Camp applications are due March 31. More information and applications can be found at www.cottonelectric.com/EnergyCamp.

The next issue of *The Current* should arrive in mailboxes April 12, 2024.

Contact Us

Do you have a story idea for *The Current*, or do you need to place an ad? If so, let us know.

We can be reached at 580-875-3351 or by email at TheCurrent@cottonelectric.com.

You can also drop us a line at Cotton Electric Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.



COTTON
ELECTRIC CO-OP

Mission Statement

Our mission is to safely deliver reliable and affordable power, provide excellent member service, and improve the quality of life in the communities we serve.

From the CEO



Jennifer Meason, CEO

A balanced team for reliability

Note from the CEO:

As the CEO of an electric cooperative, I'm frequently asked about the issues that keep me up at night. At the top of the list is the issue of energy reliability.

This month, I'd like to share with you a recent article by written by Maura Giles with NRECA. In honor of March Madness and one of my family's favorite sports, I'd like to share with you her thoughts on what we need to build a balanced team for reliability.

The winningest basketball teams in history are ones that are consistent and have players with varying abilities. Some are better at shooting three-pointers; some are best at defense. Having a balanced mix of skills makes the team a powerhouse on the court. The way to keep electricity reliable is a bit like that too.

The power team first requires a foundation of consistent sources that can be put in the game any time they're needed. Having enough "always available" fuel sources like natural gas and coal can ensure consistent power generation.

Just like a team needs different players for different situations, our power grid requires multiple sources to keep the grid running. Relying solely on one player to win every game is not an effective strategy—if they get injured, you'll likely lose. Similarly, using a single fuel source for electricity generation poses a significant risk to energy reliability. Natural disasters, geopolitical tensions or unforeseen disruptions can severely impact the supply chain of a particular fuel. A diverse mix of energy sources acts as a safeguard, ensuring that the grid remains operational even in the face of unexpected challenges.

A diverse energy mix also enhances grid flexibility by accommodating the intermittent nature of renewable energy sources like solar and wind. Think of solar power like a team's inconsistent three-point shooter. It's awesome when the sun is shining

bright, but what if it's nighttime or a cloudy day? That's where the other players, like wind, hydro, nuclear, natural gas and coal can step up and keep the team scoring.

Diverse fuel sources contribute to the stability and reliability of the electric grid. The different sources have varying characteristics, including generation patterns, responsiveness and storage capabilities. This diversity allows for a more balanced and resilient energy system that can adapt to fluctuating demand and unforeseen circumstances. Having a mix of these energy sources is like having a team with different skills to handle various situations and scenarios.

A diverse set of energy sources is essential, but that's not the only thing we need to have reliable electricity—or a winning team. Basketball teams are always trying out new plays or

training rookies to create a versatile lineup. Similarly, electric cooperatives are constantly innovating to maintain reliability for tomorrow. But creating new ways to make our power sources more efficient and reliable takes time, money and advances in technology that aren't necessarily ready yet.

As we continue to work on the innovations of tomorrow, the key to keeping our electricity reliable right now is ensuring a diverse "team" of fuels. Each one brings something special to the table, and together, they make sure we have the power we need, whenever we need it.



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Lengthen the life of your clothes dryer with regular cleaning. Clean the lint filter after every load, which improves air circulation and safety. Check the lint trap opening to ensure it's clean. Use a vacuum to remove any lint that's fallen inside the opening.

If you use dryer sheets, check the lint filter for residue buildup. Remove any residue with hot water and a nylon brush or toothbrush. Over time, dryer sheets can leave a film on the filter, which can affect the performance of the motor.

Source: www.energystar.gov

January 2024 Operating Stats		
	2024	2023
Total Amount Billed/Accrued	\$7,809,017	\$7,601,407
Cost of Purchased Power	5,808,418	5,167,429
Taxes	127,479	157,543
Total Operating Expense per Mile	1,496	1,309
Average Farm and Residential Bill	211	195
Average Farm and Residential kWh	1,984	1,564
Total Meters Billed (Farm, Residential)	19,579	19,349
Miles Energized	5,266	5,254
Density per Mile	3.72	3.68
New Service Connects YTD	28	36
Services Retired	2	9

Upcoming Deadlines for The Current	
April	
Ad Sales	March 29
Classified	March 29
Publish	April 12
May	
Ad Sales	April 26
Classified	April 26
Publish	May 10

The Current

Published Monthly at Walters, Oklahoma by Cotton Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Carli Eubank..... Communications Specialist

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"Cotton Electric Current" (USPS #134-020) is published monthly by: Cotton Electric Co-op, 226 North Broadway, Walters, OK 73572
Periodicals Postage paid at Lawton, OK 73501-4649

Postmaster Send #3579 To The Cotton Current 226 North Broadway Walters, OK 73572

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Energy Efficiency

Investing in your energy efficiency: Planning for savings

The next few months should present a perfect opportunity to invest your time and money into the energy efficiency of your home or business. Typically, our next two or three energy bills will be decreasing due to the improving weather conditions. These months are what we refer to as “shoulder months.”

During these times we see a significant reduction in heating/cooling loads on homes, and therefore lower energy consumption. The savings from these lower bills can be combined with incoming tax returns to form a healthy budget for improvements.

Where to start?

Conduct an energy evaluation

The best place to start is by finding out where your home’s efficiency stands currently. You can accomplish this through a professional energy evaluation offered by your electric cooperative or by performing a self-evaluation of your home. This evaluation will help pinpoint any inefficiencies and help to guide your decisions moving forward.

More information about Cotton Electric’s home energy efficiency evaluations can be found in last month’s edition of *The Current* on Page 3 at www.cottonelectric.com/TheCurrent.

Prioritize improvements

Develop an investment plan based around the findings in step one. You want to prioritize your investments based on their initial cost, savings potential, and your return on investment (ROI) timeline. These improvements may include upgrading to appliances that are more energy efficient (heat pumps, water heaters, or refrigerators), improving insulation, or sealing air leaks. Ultimately, you want to determine how long your investment will take to pay you back in energy savings.

Take advantage of incentives

Some forms of incentives available currently are your Cotton Electric Energy Efficiency Rebate program, dealer/installer incentives, and federal tax credits for efficiency improvements. There may be other incentives and pro-

grams available for specific commercial entities and some low-income homes. You can use these incentives to help offset the initial cost of your efficiency upgrades to stretch your budget and shorten your ROI.

Monitor and maintain

Regularly monitor your energy usage and compare. This allows you to track the effectiveness of your upgrades and detail your savings associated with each one. Use all the information available to you during this process, but also keep in mind that not all months are comparable. A February when the average temperatures stay around 20 degrees Fahrenheit cannot be compared to one when averages are around 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Additionally, plan for and prioritize routine maintenance on equipment. New equipment should not mean that you forget about it until it fails. Prolong the life span and maintain the efficiency of your new investments by servicing them regularly.



Heath Morgan,
Energy Efficiency
Coordinator

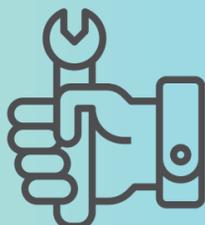
Investing in your own energy efficiency is a smart financial decision with many long-term benefits. By reducing energy consumption, lowering energy bills, improving comfort, and enhancing the value of your property, energy-efficient upgrades offer many ways to see a return on your investment. Prioritizing your home’s efficiency now will help you plan for energy savings in the future.

For questions or more information on energy efficiency tips, visit www.cottonelectric.com/energy-efficiency.

Ways to invest in your energy efficiency



Conduct an energy evaluation



Prioritize improvements



Take advantage of incentives



Monitor and maintain

Heating Degree Day and Cooling Degree Day Calendar

FEBRUARY

HDD YEAR CDD

412

2024 1

527

2023 0

694

2022 0

Degree days measure how cold or warm a location is by comparing the average of the high and low (mean) of the outdoor temperatures recorded in that location to the standard U.S. temperature, which is 65 F. The assumption is that we don’t need heating or cooling to be comfortable when this is the outdoor temperature.



LOCALLY OWNED BY OUR MEMBERS



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Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation

CECF announces first quarter grant recipients

Pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters – set enough of them aside on a regular basis, and the coins add up to dollars. That’s how Operation Round Up (ORU) works.

Most Cotton Electric members participate in ORU, in which power bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar. The amount rounded up can be as little as 1 cent and is never more than 99 cents. On average, each participating member contributes about \$6 each year.

The funds are pooled and administered by the Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation (CECF), a Board of Directors who meets quarterly to consider grant applications from individuals and organizations in the area. The board consists of Jennifer Meason, Cotton Electric CEO; Shan Files, president of Cotton Electric’s Board of Trustees; and three representatives from the Cotton Electric service area: Cindy Zelbst, Polly Krasser and Carter Waid.

The CECF Board met in February to review several grant applications. Grants totaling \$11,157.43 will be distributed to nine of the applicants.

First quarter CECF grant recipients include: AmVets Post 11, Cache High School FCCLA, Christians Concerned, Comanche FFA, Cotton County Sheriff’s Office, Girl Scouts Western Oklahoma, One True Light, Inc., Sterling Public Schools and Think Ability, Inc.

Second quarter applications are due June 7, 2024. The CECF Board will meet again June 21 to review applications for the quarter.

CECF grant guidelines and applications can be downloaded and completed at www.cottonelectric.com/grant-applications. Applications can also be submitted by email to zyoung@cottonelectric.com or by mail to 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.

First Quarter Grants

- AmVets Post 11**
\$1,200 for tables and chairs
- Cache High School FCCLA**
\$500 for Bulldog Bites program
- Christians Concerned**
\$2,000 for food supplies
- Comanche FFA**
\$2,500 for a manual cold saw
- Cotton County’s Sheriff’s Office**
\$1,012.43 for four emergency kits
- Girl Scouts Western Oklahoma**
\$600 for three kayaks
- One True Light, Inc.**
\$500 for items for Food and Fun programs
- Sterling Public Schools**
\$1,845 for graphing calculators
- Think Ability, Inc.**
\$1,000 for shelves in their Microgreen room

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Practice safety when DIY-ing

These days many of us are spending more time at home and finding new, creative ways to enhance our living space. Tackling do-it-yourself (DIY) projects for the home can be fun and cost-effective, so why not roll up those sleeves and get started! Whether you're painting the front door with a fresh hue or finally upgrading those patio lights, successfully completing a DIY home project is incredibly satisfying. But many of these projects do not come without risks.

Here are a few safety tips to keep in mind as you get to work.

- Start by selecting a designated work area. The amount of space you'll need will depend on the size and scope of your project, but make sure you have adequate lighting and ventilation (if necessary). Required tools and equipment should be located in your workspace and organized for easy access.

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) is your friend. We know you're a pro but investing a few bucks in PPE

is essential for most home projects. Stock up on safety goggles, dust masks, ear plugs (or noise reduction ear protectors), gloves and any other kind of protection you'll need for your project. Remember to wear appropriate clothing and shoes. (Ditch the sandals for this!)

- Work slowly and clean as you go. When you rush through a DIY project, you'll likely end up with less desirable results than you intended, or worse, you could make a costly or dangerous mistake. Take your time and remember that you are in control of the project. You should also clean as you go to ensure a safer workspace. Pick up any scrap materials, tools that aren't in use and any tripping hazards.

- Be cautious with power tools. Annually, 8% of electrocutions in the U.S. are attributed to improper use of power tools. The Electrical Safety Foundation International offers the following safety tips:

- o Use ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) with

every power tool to protect against electrical shock.

- o Never use power tools near live electrical wires or water pipes.

- o Use extreme caution when cutting or drilling into walls where electrical wires or water pipes could be accidentally touched or penetrated.

- o If a power tool trips a safety device while in use, take the tool to a manufacturer-authorized repair center for service.

- o Do not use power tools without the proper guards.

- o When using a wet-dry vacuum cleaner or a pressure washer, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid electrical shock.

Remember, you should only tackle DIY home projects within your skill and comfort level. For projects that require extensive electrical work, we strongly recommend you hire a licensed, qualified electrician for assistance.

To learn more about electrical safety, visit our website at www.cottonelectric.com/ safety.



Remember to work safely when tackling a DIY project. Photo source: Sam Clark.

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Co-op HVAC rebate program begins April 1

ment until parts fail. Preventive practices involve periodic maintenance as required by manufacturers. There are numerous studies showing the effects that poor maintenance procedures have on HVAC systems. A majority of studies show a 5% loss of efficiency over the course of one year. This loss in efficiency can be attributed to a reduction of airflow through indoor and outdoor coils. As dirt attaches to coils, airflow is limited. Units not properly serviced, even for just a few years, can have up to 40% loss of efficiency throughout its life.

Lack of maintenance can affect more than just the efficiency of the unit. Restricted airflow can raise operating amperage of motors and compressors, resulting in a shortened operating life span. You wouldn't drive your car with a flat tire, would you? Continuing to drive with a flat tire would result in further damage. The same is true for your air conditioning system. Running components at higher amps than they are designed for will decrease the life of that component.

For most homeowners, it is impossible to know if your unit has a weak start capacitor or is low on refrigerant; this is why we recommend involving a professional contractor. Scheduled tune-ups allow professionals an opportunity to perform recommended cleanings and to test specific components and refrigerant levels that keep your system operating properly.

Applications will be available at www.CottonElectric.com/rebate-program, through your contractor or at one of Cotton Electric's office locations.

Beginning April 1, Cotton Electric is offering a rebate of up to \$50 per home (50% of the cost of your spring tune-up, excluding repairs, up to \$50) or up to \$75 per home (50% of the cost of your annual maintenance contract, excluding repairs, up to \$75) for members who get a tune-up for their HVAC system. In order to qualify, the following guidelines must be met:

- Must be a Cotton Electric Cooperative member. Residence must be within Cotton Electric's service territory.
- Rebate is not available for new construction.
- A completed Rebate Application is required. Application forms can be downloaded at CottonElectric.com and are available at the Walters and Duncan offices or by calling 580-875-3351.

- Application must be signed and dated by both the member and a licensed and bonded HVAC contractor.

- Member must submit a dated, itemized invoice as proof of service completion from a qualified contractor. A copy of the annual contract must be submitted showing at least two scheduled maintenance checks, if applicable. Failure to provide required information will result in denial of rebate.

- Rebates are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until program funds have been depleted.

- Rebate not valid on gas-fired furnaces.

- Rebate limited to one tune-up per home annually.

- HVAC tune-ups must be completed by June 20, 2024. Rebate applications must be received by June 30, 2024.

Tune-Up Checklist

Tune-ups must be performed by a qualified service professional and must include the following criteria:

- Check and correct unit's refrigerant pressure and tubing
- Check thermostat settings, wiring and other electric parts and connections
- Inspect air filters
- Test AC and furnace starting capabilities
- Test safety controls
- Clean and adjust blower components
- Measure temperature difference
- Measure volts/amps on AC and furnace
- Lubricate all applicable parts
- Check temperature calibration and adjust, if needed
- Check AC evaporator coil and clean, if necessary
- Clean AC condenser coil
- Clean AC condensate drains
- Check thermostat operation

Spring is here, and now is the perfect time to start prepping for summer. From April 1 through June 20, Cotton Electric is offering to help members offset the cost of getting air conditioning units ready for high summer temperatures.

Through the HVAC Tune-Up Rebate program, the co-op will provide a rebate of 50% of the cost of your spring tune-up service, excluding repairs and not to exceed \$50. Continued from last year, the co-op will extend the rebate to include 50% of the cost of annual maintenance contracts on heat pump systems, excluding repairs and not to exceed \$75. The goal of this incentive program is to ensure the largest power-consuming appliance in members' homes is ready to operate at peak performance when needed most.

When was the last time you had your home's HVAC system serviced?

Heating and air conditioning systems are typically the third largest purchase for homeowners, led only by home and vehicle purchases. Like with a vehicle, lack of maintenance can have a dramatic impact on the efficiency and life of HVAC systems. Many car owners would not even consider skipping the scheduled maintenance of their vehicle; the same type of thinking should be applied to air conditioning service.

There are two schools of thought when it comes to maintaining these systems: reactive and preventive. Reactive or "run-to-fail" practices are marked by forgoing regular maintenance and running equip-

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Can you save too much for a rainy day?

"Save for a rainy day" is an old piece of advice — and a good one. But is it possible to save too much?

To begin with, what defines a "rainy day" in terms of financial needs? It could be any number of things: a temporary loss of employment, a major home or car repair, a large medical bill, and so on.

If you did not have the



money readily available to pay for these types of expenses, you might be forced to dip into your IRA, 401(k) or other retirement accounts, incurring taxes and possible penalties, as well as lowering the amount of money you'd have available for retirement. And that's why it's a good idea to build an emergency fund containing up to six months' worth of total expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account that's separate from the accounts you use for your daily spending needs. An emergency fund is valuable, but many people may be overfunding it. And while this isn't the biggest

financial mistake one can make, it could result in some missed opportunities.

For one thing, when you keep money in a low-risk account, you can generally count on your principal being protected, which means the money will be there for you when you need it—but the flip side is that this money likely won't grow very much, if at all. And if you're going to achieve your long-term goals, such as a comfortable retirement, you need your investment portfolio to provide you with significant growth potential within the context of your individual risk tolerance. So, any excess dollars kept

in your rainy-day fund might be used to help fuel some growth-oriented investments.

You could also use these dollars to help diversify your investment portfolio. If you only owned one type of investment, your portfolio could take a big hit if a market downturn affected just that asset class. But by owning a mix of stocks, bonds, government securities and other investments, you can help reduce the impact of market volatility. (Keep in mind, though, that diversification, by itself, can't protect against all losses.)

Still, before deciding on what to do with extra

money you might have in your emergency fund, how will you know if you indeed have too much? Up to six months' worth of total expenses may be adequate for most people — but everyone's life is different. For example, if you have reason to believe your employment — or that of your spouse — may be in jeopardy in the near future, or if you anticipate the need for some renovations to your home, but not for a year or so, you might want more than six months of expenses tucked away in your emergency fund. Also, once you're retired, you may well want to keep a year's worth of expenses

in the fund. If you need cash, you don't want to be forced to sell investments when their price may be down, especially since you have less time for them to recover.

Ultimately, when thinking about how much to keep in your emergency fund, review your situation carefully and weigh as many variables as you can. And if you do decide your rainy-day fund is abundant, use any "overflow" in a way that can help you keep moving toward your financial goals.

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MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

Beautify your yard, not utility equipment

Green or grey utility boxes, known as pad-mounted or padmount transformers, are part of the supply chain that helps provide power to your neighborhood. Those boxes sit on an easement, which allows us access to them.

What are the green boxes for? Their job is to step down high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage needed for the underground wires supplying power to the lights and appliances in homes.

Please do not paint, enhance, block or otherwise obstruct padmount transformers. By respecting all utility equipment, including meters and transformers, you can help keep the power on and your local utility workers safe.

As you beautify your yard this spring and summer, Cotton Electric Cooperative and Safe Electricity remind you of these safety tips:

• Do not plant shrubs and trees close to green box transformers or other utility equipment. Limiting or restricting access to the box in your yard by us could delay restoration work during an outage and create a serious safety hazard. We need at least 10 feet of clearance in front of the transformer (the side that is padlocked), as well as four feet of clearance on the other three sides.

• Contact us with questions about landscaping around or installing fencing near a padmount transformer (or any other changes) to learn what is allowable.

• Contact us if the transformer becomes unlocked or if it or any other type of utility equipment appears to be damaged.

• Call 811 prior to digging around a transformer and respect the clearance requirements noted above. If you dig near a transformer (even if it is beyond the clearance requirements), you could inadvertently hit a live underground cable. Always call OKIE 811 prior to any digging.

• Keep a clear path to the transformer. Even though the transformer seems like it is in "your yard," it is technically on an easement, and our workers need clear access to it to maintain equipment and keep power running smoothly.

Contact us with any questions or concerns about the safety of padmount transformers. Always teach children that they should not sit on, open, or play around the green boxes.

For more about electrical safety, visit www.cottonelectric.com/safety or www.safeelectricity.org.

Can You Dig It?

An underground utility line is **damaged once every 9 minutes** because someone didn't call 811.

Call 811, the "Call Before You Dig Number," at least **2 business days** prior to digging.

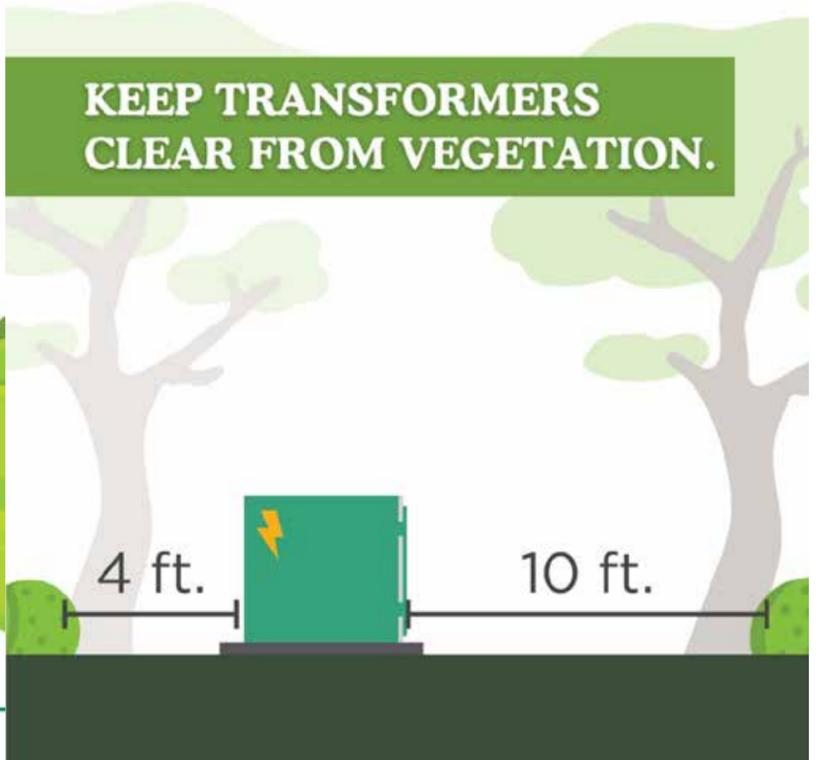
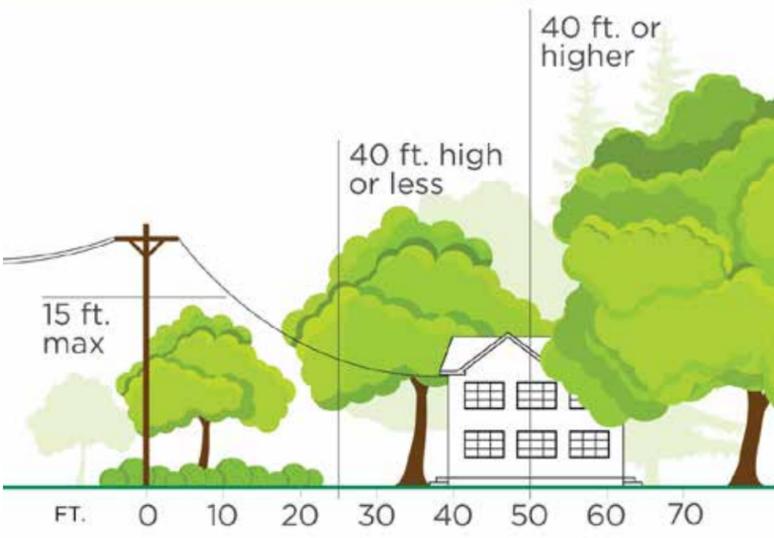
811 locators **do not detect** underground sprinkler systems, invisible fences, data communication systems, private water systems, or gas piping to a garage.

Even if you have previously had underground utilities marked, **utilities can shift**, so it's best to call before starting a new project.

Once **all of your utilities** have been located, then you can start your digging project!

Learn more at SafeElectricity.org

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Local seniors attending 2024 Leadership Summit



Cora Sullivan



Sara Durbin



High school seniors Sara Durbin and Cora Sullivan will represent Cotton Electric Cooperative at the 2024 Leadership Summit March 18 at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City. Durbin and Sullivan were selected from those who participated in the 2023 Youth Tour essay competition. Each student at Leadership Summit will take home a \$500 college scholarship.

Sara Durbin is the daughter of Cotton Electric members Allen and Stephanie Durbin, and she attends Cache High School. There, she is the vice president for the Cache FFA chapter, a committee member of the Beta Club and part of STUCO. When she's not in school, Durbin loves to watch movies and is currently a dancer and dance teacher at Lawton Ballet Theatre. Durbin plans on attending the University of Oklahoma to earn a bachelor's degree in nursing and become a NICU nurse.

Cora Sullivan is the daughter of Cotton Electric members Joshua and Courtney Sullivan, and she attends MacArthur High School in Lawton. There, she is highly involved in the local Lawton FFA chapter where she has served as the chapter president this year. Outside of school, she enjoys working on her show cattle. Sullivan plans on attending Oklahoma State University to major in animal science with a minor in agribusiness.

During Leadership Summit, Durbin, Sullivan and other attendees from Oklahoma electric cooperatives will participate in activities designed to encourage students to become leaders of their schools and communities.

Durbin and Sullivan are looking forward to learning from guest speakers on how to become a better leader at the 2024 Leadership Summit.

For more information about the coop's youth programs, visit www.cottonelectric.com/youth-programs.

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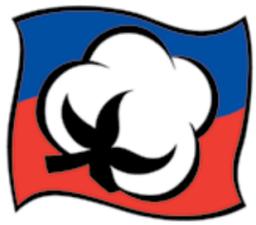
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Co-op Life

Community Spotlight

If you would like your community event listed in the April issue, please submit information by calling 580-875-3351 or send an email to TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com by March 29. Only events occurring after April 8 will be published in the next issue.

Editor's Note: We recommend checking for cancellations with local sources before attending any event.

Local annual music festival

Celebrate the coming of spring amid cobblestone-lined streets at the Park-Stomp Music Festival. This annual Medicine Park event features great music for the whole family including bluegrass, country, rockabilly, punk and rock. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets to gather around the main stage, or browse the booths of arts and crafts. All of the town's stores and restaurants will be open for the event, and food vendors will be available. The event is March 15-17 at Town Center Mainstage in Medicine Park. For more information, visit www.medicinepark.com or call 580-529-2825.

Carden Circus comes to town

Watch a performance beyond your imagination as aerialists fly through the air at the Carden Circus. For more than 50 years, the Carden Circus has performed across the country with acrobats, elephants, camels and much more, providing entertainment for the entire family. The event is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on March 18 at the Stephens County Fairgrounds, 2002 S. 13th in Duncan. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.spectacularcircus.com.

Auto Swap Meet in Duncan

Duncan's annual Automotive Swap Meet takes place March 21-23 at the Stephens County Fairgrounds, 2002 S. 13th in Duncan. This is an indoor and outdoor swap meet for avid muscle car and antique car enthusiasts. The Swap Meet includes auto-related vendors, and on-site camping facilities and concessions are available. Enjoy browsing through everything from

boats and motorcycles to trucks and tractors, as well as auto-related memorabilia. For more information, visit www.duncanokswapmeet.com.

Musical comedy anniversary show

Southwest Pride Barbershop Chorus presents the 60-year anniversary show of The Great Barbershop Bake-Off. Performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on March 22 and 2 p.m. on March 23 at McMahon Auditorium in Lawton. For more information or to purchase tickets, call 580-581-3470, visit www.swokarts.com or stop by Scott's House of Flowers.

Passion Play at the Holy City

Join visitors from across Oklahoma to see the 99th Prince of Peace Easter Pageant. Witness the story of Jesus Christ portrayed in pantomime while readers broadcast the script on FM radio. Attendance is free, but donations are appreciated. Bring lawn chairs and dress accordingly since it is an outdoor event. This event begins at 8:30 p.m. or dusk March 23 and March 30 at the Holy City of the Wichitas, 262 Holy City Road, Cache. For more information, call 580-429-3361.

Food pantry open once monthly

Walters Community Food Pantry is open from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. on the second Saturday of each month. The pantry is in the old City Hall, 131 1/2 W. California Street. Pantry organizers try to provide a two-week supply of basic staples to anyone with identification and proof of Cotton County residency. Monetary donations may be sent to Food Pantry, c/o Paul Metcalfe, 211 E. Colorado St., Walters. For more information, call Roger Noland at 580-591-6826.

Blessings Boutique open monthly

Marlow First United Methodist Church opens its Blessings Boutique from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. every first and third Tuesday of the month. Clothing donation drop-off days are Tuesdays, or donors can call the church at 580-658-2765 to make other arrangements.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Cotton Electric members Paul and Dorothy Adams are ready to cheer on their granddaughter before her ballgame.

Enter your "best shot" in our Photo of the Month contest. The theme for April is Seasonal Colors! Entries can be emailed to TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com or mailed to The Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572. Winners will receive a Cotton Electric prize.

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Together we power your community

Behind every flick of a light switch, there is an entire team of Cotton Electric employees working hard to make sure electricity is delivered reliably and safely to homes and businesses. While many employees work behind the scenes, they all play a role in helping power communities and people's lives.

Your Administrative Department keeps your cooperative running efficiently by guiding its efforts to meet the expectations of our members. Your Director of Safety, Loss Control and Vegetation Management provides trainings to keep employees and members safe. Your Human Resources Department recruits potential new hires and oversees the benefits and well-being of employees.

Your Accounting Department reviews spreadsheets and statements to ensure your cooperative is well managed financially. Your IT Department maintains and checks the security of technology equipment.

Your Billing and Member Services Department answers questions on outages, billing and more. Your Energy Efficiency Coordinator provides tips and expertise on how you can help lower energy bills. Your Marketing Department provides information and updates on cooperative business.

Your Dispatch Department relays vital information to crews and helps keep them safe when working in hazardous conditions. Your Engineering Department works on operational planning, analysis, and design.

Your Warehouse and Garage Departments monitor inventory of cooperative equipment and materials. Your Meters and Transformers Department installs and maintains meters across the service territory.

Your Vegetation Management Department trims trees and greenery from interfering with power lines to help maintain reliable power. Your Operations department is dispatched to areas across the service territory to fix and maintain electrical equipment in order to ensure public safety and restore power.

The Cotton Electric Services Inc. (CESI) team constantly tests personal protective equipment to help keep thousands of lineworkers safe on the job.

Everyone on these pages plays an important part on the team that keeps our communities safe and powered by bringing unique skills that contribute to the success of your cooperative. Together we are making a powerful difference.



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Fleet Operations Director



JAMES APRIESNIG
General Accounting Supervisor



KEVIN BARRINEAU
Dispatcher



JOSH BELCHER
Meter Data Analyst



TJ BIRDWELL
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SCOTT CREW
Supervisor of Engineering Services



LARRY CROWELL
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TONYA DANIEL
Director of Member Services



SCOTT DENNIS
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Apprentice Lineman



AUBREY EDMONSON
Crewman



CARLI EUBANK
Communications Specialist



JENNIE EVANS
Member Service Representative



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Lab Technician



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Meter Technician Shop Foreman



BRYAN GOODE
Apprentice Field Meter Technician



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Member Service Representative



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Member Service Representative



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Operations Superintendent



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Journeyman Lineman



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ELY KING
Apprentice Lineman



HEATH KING
Vegetation Management Worker



JUSTIN KING
Warehouse Manager



JENNIFER KRIZ
Member Service Representative



GREG KOHOUT
Auto Mechanic I



JAKE LAWLER
Lead Lab Technician



KYLE LINTICUM
Journeyman Lineman



TY LOGAN
Staking & Line Inspection Engineer



RONNIE MANSEL
Journeyman Lineman



JENNIFER MEASON
Chief Executive Officer



ADAM METCALFE
Purchasing Agent



GREG McCOMBER
IT Supervisor



MONTY McDANIEL
IT Technician



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Vegetation Management Foreman



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Energy Efficiency Coordinator



DILLON NEWBY
Vegetation Management Worker



RYAN NOLAND
Lab Technician



QUAID OGLETREE
Journeyman Lineman



MIKE OTTINGER
Vice President of Operations



LUKE PATMAN
Vegetation Management Worker



CHACE PENN
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Meter & Transformer Supervisor



DANIELLE QUICKLE
Executive Assistant



TAYLOR RAINS
Apprentice Lineman



ANTHONY REED
Journeyman Field Meter Technician



JASON RED ELK
Meter Tester



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CESI Representative



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Work Order Clerk



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Journeyman Lineman



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VICKIE SMITH
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Supervisor - Duncan



ZACK SMITH
Crew Chief



BRETT SPENCE
Lab Technician



BRADY STAPP
Lab Technician



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Accounts Payable Clerk



JEREMY STEWART
Warehouse Materials
Handler



JOE STUCKEY
Accountant I



DILLON THOMPSON
Journeyman Lineman



SHAYNE WHITE
Journeyman Lineman



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Food can mimic features of popular weight loss drugs



Kim Bandelier, MPH, RD, LD

Food For THOUGHT

Individuals trying to lose weight are aggressively pursuing GLP1 agonists, a class of drug originally approved for the management of Type 2 diabetes. Some have now been approved for weight loss. These drugs are featured on commercials, morning talk shows, evening news, reality TV, and social media due to the drastic weight loss patients achieve while on the drugs. Insurance coverage of the drugs is sporadic, and side effects abound, making it difficult for many to stay on the drug and continue to keep the weight off.

GLP1 stands for glucagon-like peptide-1, and “agonist” in drug vocabulary refers to a substance that binds to a receptor inside or on a cell, causing the same response as the substance that normally binds to the cell. In simple terms, these drugs mimic the response of substances from certain foods and help reduce appetite and slow the transit of food through the GI tract. This results in improved blood glucose management and weight loss in most people. Due to unknown factors, some

individuals are nonresponsive to the drug or require very high doses to see a response.

Not everyone is successful on or can tolerate the side effects of these drugs. There is an ongoing debate as to how to stay on them given most people gain back significant amounts of weight if they stop taking the drugs. Perhaps some of the answer lies in the better understanding of what nutrients stimulate the natural secretion of the GLP1 and other hunger-reducing hormones in the body.

GLP1 hormone is naturally secreted by cells in the gastrointestinal tract in response to food. Certain foods stimulate natural secretion of GLP1 on a smaller scale than a drug. Naturally secreted GLP1 and other hunger-reducing hormones play a role in gradual weight loss but without the side effects of drugs that promote rapid weight loss. Although many nutrients stimulate the release of hunger-reducing hormones, some do it without adding a significant amount of energy or calories added. This is essential when pursuing weight loss and keeping off the weight lost.

Fiber is potentially the most logical nutrient to start with when trying to achieve natural fullness. Fiber does not contribute calories, but it does reduce hunger as well as improve bowel function. It also fuels the good bacteria in the colon. The colon bacteria ferment specific types of fiber (prebiotic fiber) into short-chain fatty acids (SCFA). SCFAs have been shown to increase natural secretion of GLP1 in addition to other favorable functions.

The US Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consuming between 25 grams and 30 grams of fiber



One way to increase intake of fiber is through whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber grains and cereals. Photo courtesy of MetroCreative.

per day. Most people in the U.S. fall well short of this goal, consuming on average 15 grams of fiber per day. Fiber is most available in fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber grains and cereals. Fiber supplements are available, but intake of whole foods is preferred.

Protein is another stimulator of natural GLP1 secretion. It is essential for many other bodily functions, including feeding your muscles so you can stay active. The current protein intake recommendation is 0.8 grams per kilogram body weight, but that level only prevents a deficiency. It’s a minimum.

In individuals seeking to further stimulate natural secretion of hunger-preventing hormones, the daily requirement for protein is most likely higher. We know for older adults, the protein requirement is closer to 1.2 grams per kilogram per day to manage age-related muscle loss. For individuals intentionally losing weight, the estimated protein needed in order to lose more fat than muscle is 50% more than the recommended intake.

Specific fats and carbohydrates also stimulate natural GLP1 secretion, but they do so with an addition of calories. More research needs to be done to determine how these nutrients can be harnessed to improve secretion of these hormones without providing excess calories.

If you are exploring weight loss but are not ready for the cost (financial and physical) of the newer drugs, consider diet changes that help your body maximize its natural secretion of GLP1 and other hunger-reducing hormones. Add fiber, particularly soluble fiber from fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber grain products. Add protein sources that are lean, a mix of animal and plant-based (Plant-based will add some extra fiber).

As you do so, monitor how your body responds to these changes. Are you less hungry? Seek the help of a registered dietitian to make these changes in context of your food likes/dislikes and budget.



French Toast Casserole

Ingredients

- 1 loaf French bread (about 1 1/2 pounds), cut into 1-inch cubes
- 5 large eggs
- 1 1/2 cups unsweetened milk
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt
- maple syrup, for serving

Topping:

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter or coconut oil, melted
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 cup frozen blueberries
- confectioners’ sugar, for dusting

Directions:

Grease 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Place bread cubes in baking dish. In large bowl, whisk eggs, milk, brown sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. Pour mixture evenly over bread cubes.

If making casserole ahead, cover baking dish and refrigerate overnight. If baking immediately, let stand 30 minutes at room temperature to allow bread to soak up egg mixture.

Preheat oven to 350 F.

To make topping: Drizzle casserole with melted butter and sprinkle with brown sugar and pecans. Top with strawberries and blueberries.

Cover and bake 35 minutes then uncover and bake 10-20 minutes, or until topping is browned and egg mixture has mostly set.

Remove from oven, cover loosely with foil and let stand 10 minutes. Dust with confectioners’ sugar. Serve with maple syrup.

Warm Up Mornings with a Fresh Casserole

(Culinary.net) On a cool, crisp morning, it’s hard to beat an exciting twist on a breakfast classic.

This French Toast Casserole is crisp on top while soft and moist in the middle, coming fresh out of the oven with the aroma of maple syrup and pecans that will have the whole house eager for a bite. It’s easy enough to make fresh in the morning- but can also be prepared the night before so all you have to do is add the topping and pop it in the oven.

Find more fresh breakfast recipes to start your day at Culinary.net.

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Give comfort food classics an authentic Mexican twist

(Family Features) If winter evenings have you stuck in a dinner rut, heat up the kitchen with family favorites everyone can look forward to. Shaking off the chill can start with a cozy blanket and comforting food that warms you from the inside out.

Soup is a wintertime staple thanks to its simplicity, and you can put a delicious spin on your next winter warmup with Mexican-inspired ingredients. Giving soup night a twist starts with Cacique Foods, one of the country's top authentic Mexican food brands, that invites friends and family to share real moments while savoring authentic flavors.

This Smoky Chorizo and Chicken Pozole relies on the bold, hearty, spicy taste of Cacique's Pork Chorizo combined with handcrafted Homestyle Salsa.

Queso Fresco's crumbly, creamy texture and milky, fresh flavor adds the perfect finishing touch, making this soup a perfect way to warm up weeknights with just the right amount of heat.

For a flavorful side that complements a variety of main courses while adding Mexican flair, consider Mexican Loaded Mashed Potatoes. This recipe is a familiar favorite with the unique twist of bacon and Pork Chorizo for a meat-infused recipe that will become a menu mainstay.

Plus, for an extra creamy texture, it calls for Cacique Crema Mexicana – an everyday table cream with a neutral, fresh-tasting flavor ideal for balancing out spice – and Oaxaca, a semisoft cheese with a mellow, buttery flavor.

Find more comforting recipes at caciquefoods.com.



Smoky Chorizo and Chicken Pozole

Prep time: 5 minutes | Cook time: 30 minutes | Servings: 6-8

- | | |
|--|--|
| 2 tablespoons olive oil | 1 quart chicken stock |
| 1 large white or yellow onion, finely chopped | 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs or breasts, trimmed of excess fat and diced |
| 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus additional, to taste (optional) | 1 can (25 ounces) white hominy, drained and rinsed |
| 1 package (9 ounces) Cacique Pork Chorizo | 1 lime, cut into wedges |
| 2 teaspoons smoked paprika | 3/4 cup crumbled Cacique Rancho Queso Fresco |
| 1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano | 1/2 cup chopped cilantro |
| 1 container (16 ounces) Cacique Medium Homestyle Salsa | |

In large, heavy pot over medium heat, heat oil. Reserve 1/4 cup onion for garnish; add remaining onion to pot and season with salt. Saute until translucent, about 5 minutes.

Increase heat to medium-high; add pork chorizo and break it apart with spoon. Cook chorizo undisturbed until deeply browned and cooked through, 3-5 minutes. Add smoked paprika and oregano; cook 30 seconds, or until fragrant.

Pour in salsa and scrape up browned bits from bottom of pan. Bring to simmer 1-2 minutes, allowing it to thicken slightly then add stock and bring to simmer.

Stir in diced chicken and hominy. Decrease heat to medium and cook 8-10 minutes until chicken is cooked through. Taste and season with more salt, if necessary. Remove from heat.

Serve bowls of pozole with reserved onion, lime wedges, crumbled queso fresco and chopped cilantro.

Mexican Loaded Mashed Potatoes

Prep time: 35 minutes | Cook time: 40 minutes | Servings: 10

- | | |
|--|--|
| 3 pounds russet potatoes (about 9 medium potatoes), peeled and cubed | 1 teaspoon salt |
| water | 1 teaspoon garlic powder |
| 6 bacon strips, chopped | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| 1 package Cacique Pork Chorizo | 1 cup Cacique Oaxaca or Queso Quesadilla, shredded |
| 12 ounces Cacique Crema Mexicana | 1/2 cup Cacique Crema Mexicana Agria, for topping (optional) |
| 1/2 cup butter, cubed | 3 green onions, chopped |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder | |

In Dutch oven, add potatoes and cover with water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; cook, uncovered, 10-15 minutes, or until tender.

In skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Drain on paper towels, chop into small pieces and set aside. Remove bacon grease from skillet and cook chorizo over medium-high heat, 6-8 minutes.

Drain potatoes; add to pan. Mash potatoes, gradually adding crema Mexicana, butter, onion powder, salt, garlic powder and pepper. Transfer to greased 13-by-9-inch baking dish; sprinkle with cheese, chorizo and bacon. Refrigerate, covered, up to 1 day.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Remove potatoes from refrigerator and let stand while oven heats. Bake, covered, about 30 minutes. Uncover; bake 10 minutes, or until heated through.

Drizzle with crema Mexicana agria and chopped green onions.



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Consisting of 800 Acres ± all in mixed native grass
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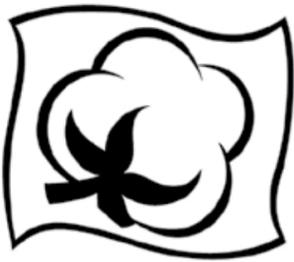
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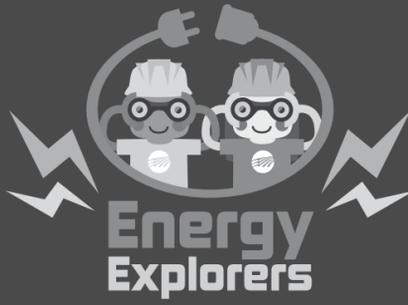
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STORM SAFETY FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Spring is a wonderful season, but it can bring powerful storms.

Read the clues below, then use the word bank to complete the storm safety tips.



1. Keep a _____ handy in case of a power outage.
2. Be watchful for signs of a thunderstorm, including dark skies, flashes of _____ or strong winds.
3. If a _____ is issued, seek shelter in a centrally-located room in your home, a basement or storm cellar.
4. If you're outside and hear _____, go indoors immediately.
5. Practice a tornado _____ with your family once a year.

WORD BANK

- thunder
- drill
- flashlight
- tornado warning
- lightning

Answer Key: 1. flashlight 2. lightning 3. tornado warning 4. thunder 5. drill

COOP OFFICIAL NOTICE **COOP**
2024 ANNUAL MEETING

WALTERS CO-OP ELEVATOR ASSN.
WALTERS, OKLAHOMA

THE MEETING WILL BE HELD AS FOLLOWS:

DATE: MARCH 8, 2024

PLACE: COTTON ELECTRIC COMMUNITY ROOM

TIME: MEAL SERVED AT 12:00 (NOON)

BUSINESS MEETING TO FOLLOW

THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WILL BE TO ELECT ONE (1) DIRECTOR, RECEIVE THE ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT, AND CONDUCT SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS MAY COME BEFORE THE MEMBERSHIP.



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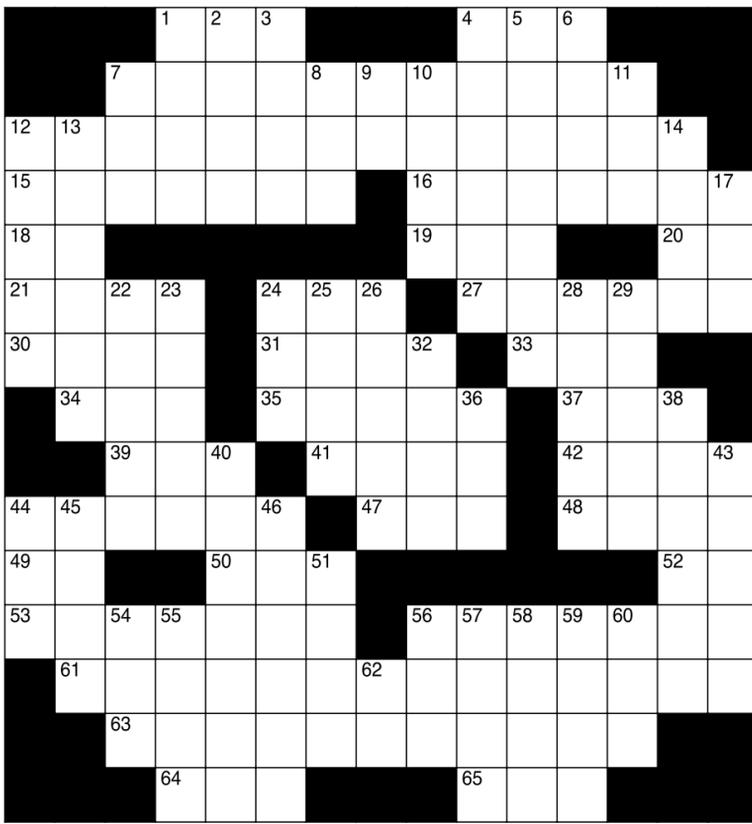


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ACROSS

1. Helps little firms
4. Political action committee
7. Allowed
12. Olivia Colman played one
15. Open
16. He had a notable lamp
18. Promotional material
19. Domesticated animal
20. Larry and Curly's buddy
21. The best ever
24. TV network
27. Checked for
30. Dry or withered
31. Expression of annoyance
33. Dash
34. Fifth note of a major scale
35. A secret clique
37. Partner to cheese
39. ___ school: where to learn healing
41. City in ancient Syria
42. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
44. Established practice
47. Thanksgiving side dish
48. District in Peru
49. It's becoming more prevalent
50. State in India
52. Measure of illumination
53. Raised platform
56. Japanese warrior
61. R.L. Stevenson novel



63. Transitory
64. Advanced degree
65. Fiddler crabs

DOWN

1. Prevent from seeing
2. Czech city
3. ___ and Andy, TV show
4. A young pig
5. Removed surgically
6. Covered with
7. Chest muscle (slang)
8. Nigerian City
9. Midway between south and east
10. A way to shut

11. Stop playing
12. Marshy places
13. Takes apart
14. Ten cents
17. A gesture of assent
22. Scent
23. Teletypewriter
24. General's assistant (abbr.)
25. Hillside
26. Taxi driver
28. Semitic Sun god
29. Town in India
32. Traditional rhythmic pattern
36. Fugitives are on the ___
38. Type of dance
40. Two letters, one sound

43. Having a strong, pleasant taste
44. Golf score
45. Mayhem
46. Drenched
51. River in north-eastern Asia
54. Drug to treat anxiety (abbr.)
55. Part-time employee
56. A very large body of water
57. Aboriginal people of Japan
58. Millisecond
59. Forearm bone
60. Subway dweller
62. Royal Mail



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(pictured left to right) Cotton Electric Director of Marketing and Communications Zach Young and Cotton Electric Energy Efficiency Coordinator Heath Morgan give a safety presentation at Mark Twain Elementary. Photos by Carli Eubank.

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