



# Co-op Advantage

## Maximizing production Fixed vs. tracking solar panels

ECE currently has two utility-sponsored solar arrays within our service territory: one at our Braham Headquarters and the other in Cambridge near Sandquist Park. Our power supplier, Great River Energy, built the 20-kW Braham array in 2014 and then worked with ENGIE North America to build the 2-MW Cambridge array in 2019.

“While the arrays generate renewable electricity,” shares Vern Johnson, COO/VP of Operations, “They’re also providing valuable information on how distributed generation solar facilities can be integrated into our system.”

Vastly different in size, a major difference between the arrays is the type of panel mounting used. The 48 panels in Braham are fixed, meaning they are stationary and do not move, whereas the over 7,000 panels in the Cambridge array are single axis tracking mounts and can turn to follow the sun throughout the day.

What does this mean? Data from the two arrays indicates that production is at a higher level for longer periods of time with the tracking panels.

When plotted on a graph in 15-minute intervals, numbers taken from the same day in June clearly highlight the value of tracking panels. That day, the Braham array reached peak production and quickly retreated, while the panels in Cambridge had a longer period of max production because they are able to turn +/- 60 degrees to follow the sun. This allows for maximum energy output, and provides for production during late afternoon and early evening when it is most valuable for ECE.

Vern adds, “Solar projects developed by our power supplier are the best way to keep costs fair across our entire membership. We’re always looking for opportunities to further explore distributed generation, including battery storage.”

FIXED SOLAR  
BRAHAM



TRACKING SOLAR  
CAMBRIDGE



## Watt's Cookin'

Congratulations to Janel Enright, a member from Rush City, MN, for winning the Watt's Cookin' honey recipe contest. Janel will receive a \$25 bill credit.

### HONEY-GARLIC SHRIMP

½ c. honey  
¼ c. low-sodium soy sauce  
1 T. minced garlic  
1 lb. medium uncooked shrimp, peeled and de-veined  
Optional: brown rice, steamed veggies

Whisk honey, soy sauce and garlic together. Place shrimp in a large bowl. Pour in half of the marinade, stir, and cover. Marinate for up to 12 hours. Refrigerate leftover marinade.

Heat skillet over medium-high heat. Place shrimp in skillet and discard used marinade. Cook until shrimp is done (about 3 minutes). Serve over rice or steamed veggies. Drizzle saved marinade on top. Yields four servings.

*To enter our Watt's Cookin' contest, mail your favorite cranberry recipe to Watt's Cookin', P.O. Box 39, Braham, MN 55006. Entries must include your name, address, telephone number, ECE account number, and be received by Oct. 16, 2020. The winning recipe and the contributor's name and city will be featured in a future edition of the Co-op Advantage. Recipes can also be emailed to [info@ecemn.com](mailto:info@ecemn.com).*



You gotta be  
in it to **WIN** it

**Congratulations**  
Randall Gustafson  
Sandstone, MN

Visit SmartHub  
to sign up for **Auto Pay** today!

## SOW SEEDS OF CAUTION

Harvest season is one of the busiest times of year for farmers – and among the most dangerous. Be aware of potential electrical hazards and take safe steps to avoid tragedy.

Keep equipment at least 10 feet from power lines in all directions. Use extra caution with ladders, poles and other extended machinery.

- Install ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to help prevent electric shock in areas that are exposed to weather and may potentially become wet.
- Take time to examine all wiring and machinery to ensure everything is grounded and working properly.
- Never operate machinery when there is a risk for lightning.

If contact is made between farming equipment and overhead lines, it's almost always best to stay in the cab. Warn others to stay away, call 911, and do not get off the equipment.



## Sales tax exemption for electric heat

If you are a Minnesota resident, you may be eligible for a sales tax exemption on your electric bill from November through April each year if electricity is the primary source of heat in your home.

To apply for a sales tax exemption, call 1-800-254-7944, visit our website, or pick up an application at any ECE Service Center.

Residential accounts in Wisconsin are automatically exempt from sales tax from November through April.

# Can my power be turned off in the winter?

## YES

Disconnection is prohibited only when it affects the primary heat source for the household and as long as ALL four conditions are met:

1. You declare an inability to pay by completing the Inability to Pay Form.
2. You provide proof of last three months total gross household income.
3. Your total gross household income, not individual income, is less than 50% of the state median income, or you are a current recipient of any public assistance with qualifying income requirements, including energy assistance.
4. Your account is current or reasonably on time with a payment plan or you make and keep a mutually acceptable payment plan at any time that considers the financial resources of the household.

*The Cold Weather Rule, in effect from October 15 to April 15 in Minnesota, governs how we handle disconnects; it does not prohibit them. We use the MN guidelines for everyone in our territory. We are prepared to work with you if you are struggling to pay your electric bill. A list of energy assistance agencies is available by calling us or at [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com). For more information about the Cold Weather Rule, see MN Statute 216B.097.*

## Military service personnel assistance

According to Minnesota law, a utility may not disconnect your service if a member of your household has been issued orders into active duty, for deployment, or for a permanent change in duty station during the period of active duty, deployment, or change in duty station.

How can your military household qualify for exemption?

- If your household income is below the state median household income or you are receiving energy assistance, and you have entered into a satisfactory payment plan with ECE and remain current with payments under that plan.
- If your household income is above the state median household income and you have entered into a plan with ECE, establishing a reasonable payment schedule that considers the financial resources of your household, and you remain current with payments under that plan.

*We use the MN guidelines for all members, including those in WI. Forms are available from ECE. For more information about military shut-off protection, see MN Statute 325E.028.*

**Have questions about either program?  
Give us a call at 1-800-254-7944  
or visit [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com).**

## 3 Simple ways to lower your energy bills this winter

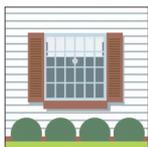
Source: U.S. Dept. of Energy



Replace incandescent light bulbs with LEDs, which use at least 75% less energy.



Wash clothes in cold water.



Seal air leaks and insulate well to prevent heat from escaping and cold air from entering your home.

## Did you notice?

Nicole works with capital credits. Did you notice a payout on your bill due in August? Your bill may have been smaller than usual.



1.800.254.7944 3



## Q&A with Sarah Siems Supervisor, Metering Systems



Our three meter data analysts monitor meter systems to ensure accurate data for billing and evaluation. They are supervised by Sarah Siems, Metering Systems Supervisor. She shares details about this important job at ECE.

### What does a meter data analyst do?

They are responsible for monitoring the advanced metering infrastructure (AMI). This is comprised of communication networks, 78,958 meters, and data management systems. Our analysts are busy! They examine and evaluate meter data, which consists of readings, outage notifications, and power quality information. They also schedule field visits for meter reconnects, maintenance, and accuracy testing.

### What is most challenging about this position?

Technology is ever-advancing, and enhancements are occurring all the time, especially when it comes to meter functionality and system software. We

utilize meter data in various software systems, including billing, outage management, as well as the SmartHub app. It's becoming increasingly important for us to stay up-to-date on technology. That is always a challenge.

### How can members stay safe around their electric meter?

We care about your safety. Never attempt to fix, alter or tamper with the meter or enclosure. It can result in serious injury or death, and is also illegal. If you notice damage, contact us or call a licensed electrician. We also like to remind members not to build things around their meters or impede access in any way.



## Touchstone Energy Community Award

Each year, we celebrate volunteerism and community service with the Touchstone Energy® Community Award. One winning organization will receive a \$1,000 cash prize and will compete with winners from other electric cooperatives for statewide recognition and an additional \$1,000 cash prize.

Any civic organization or non-profit in our service territory is eligible to compete for the award, which

recognizes outstanding contributions to the local community.

Organizations are eligible to apply for the award themselves, or community members may apply on behalf of a deserving organization.

Applications for the award are now being accepted, and are available at [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) or by calling 1-800-254-7944, ext. 8031. Completed applications must be received at our Braham Headquarters office by Monday, Oct. 19.



East Central Energy  
P.O. Box 39  
Braham, MN 55006

**Service Center locations:**  
Braham and Milaca  
Monday-Friday  
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**1.800.254.7944**  
General business calls are answered from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Emergency and outage calls are answered 24 hours a day.

**Email:** [info@ecemn.com](mailto:info@ecemn.com)

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call Executive Administrator Julie Johnson at 763-689-8046 to confirm meeting information. Monthly board meeting highlights and board operating policies can be found on SmartHub.

The Co-op Advantage newsletter is published by East Central Energy, your not-for-profit, member-owned, local electric cooperative.

ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Website:**  
[eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com)





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Contact Specialist



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MEMBER OWNED  
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