



Steve Lucas, CEO

## YOUR ELECTRIC CO-OP IS LOOKING OUT FOR YOU

**The frigid temperatures have set in for the season. Unfortunately, the winter months can bring out more than just cold weather; they can bring out the hucksters as well, who prey on people's fears of having their heat cut off when they need it most.**

One of our fellow electric cooperatives in central Wisconsin recently reported that a member received a phone call from someone claiming to be an electric co-op employee. The caller told this member that immediate payment was needed to avoid disconnection of utility services in the next half hour. The caller then provided instructions for sending money through some sort of third-party pay system.

Thankfully, the member did not fall for this scam and called the co-op immediately, but the whole incident serves as a reminder to be careful of these scam artists, who can sound very convincing.

Remember that Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative does not handle delinquent accounts in this way. We make every effort to work out payment arrangements with a member who's struggling to pay the bills, and we will contact a member numerous times before even considering disconnection. And we never demand payment through a third-party system.

If you should receive a call that sounds suspicious in any way, hang up and call our office directly to verify the call. If it's not a legitimate call, we will notify the authorities. **DO NOT** turn over any money or offer your credit card number or other personal information. Unfortunately, once you hand over

money with a wire transfer or a prepaid credit card, you'll likely not see it again. We don't want to see anyone losing their hard-earned money in this way.

Another cold-weather situation that begs some caution has to do with the purchase and/or use of electric space heaters.

When temperatures drop, you might be tempted to turn to an electric space heater to warm up your home. But many such devices are sold under advertising that can be misleading, leaving consumers with much higher energy bills than they were expecting.

First, remember that a watt is a watt. A 1,500-watt milkhouse heater will generate the same amount of heat as a 1,500-watt infrared heater with a decorative cabinet and a hefty price tag.

Going for the fancy model won't bring you more heat.

Also, some space heater manufacturers claim their products lead to savings in energy. Electric space heaters can indeed save on your heating costs, but only if their use is isolated to a single room with the heat turned way down to the rest of the house. The truth is these units use a significant amount of electricity, and they're not designed to heat an entire home. Therefore, most electric space heaters will cause an increase in your bill if they're used regularly.

Space heaters can be wonderful devices to have on hand when you need to take the chill off a cold area in your home. Just don't expect them to cut your energy costs.

Keep warm, be alert, and stay safe.



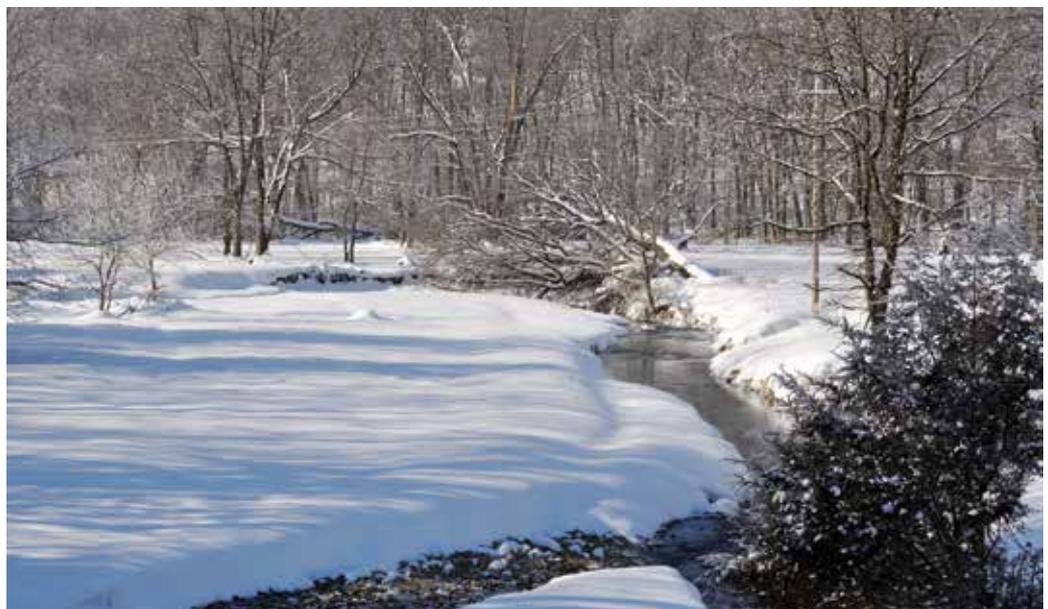
MY CO-OP

## MEMBER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

The winning photo from SREC's 2017 Member Photo Contest for February was taken by John J. Dalsing of Cuba City.

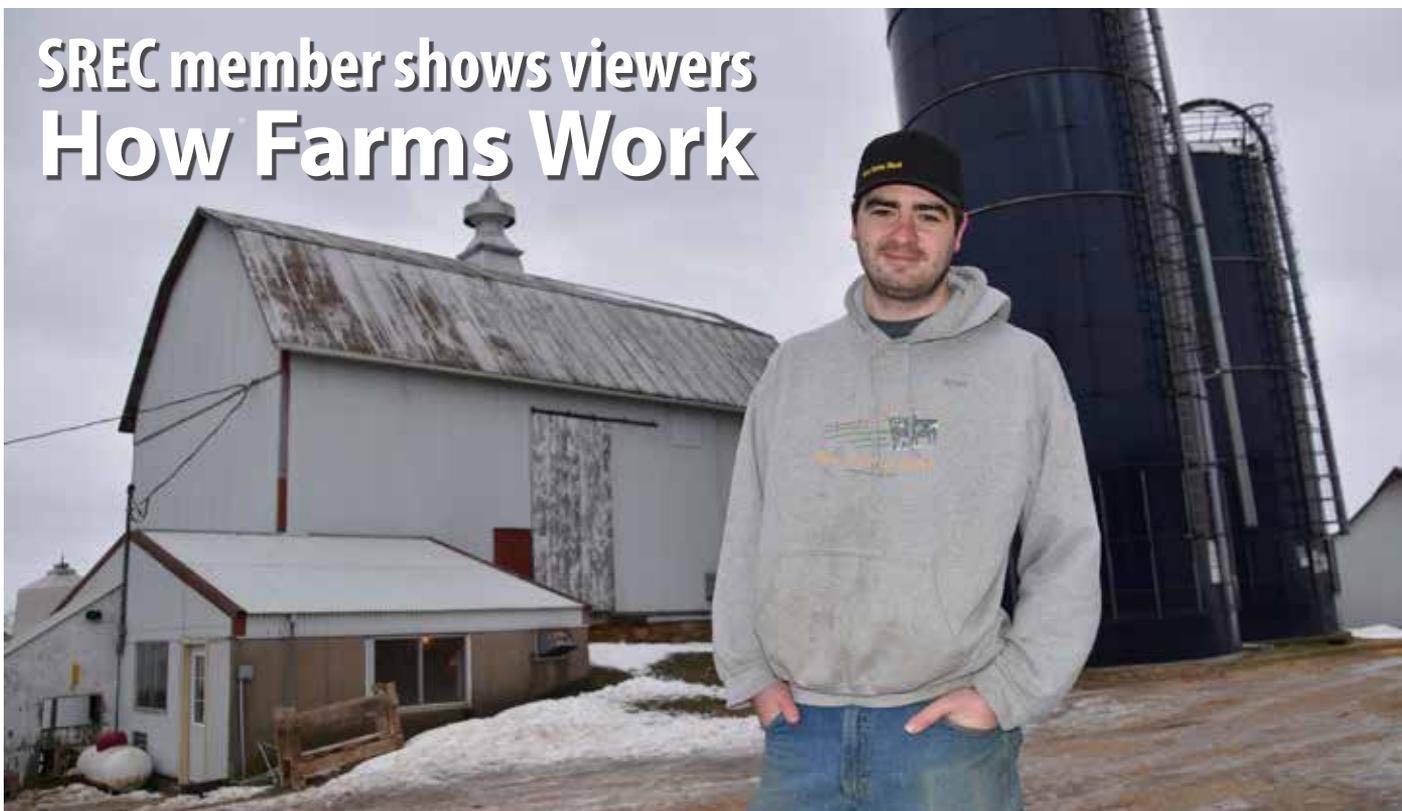
We still have copies of our 2017 calendar available. Pick yours up from any of our offices—in Lancaster, Gays Mills, and Darlington—while supplies last.

Next year's Member Photo Contest begins February 1 and runs until August 21. Turn to page 18 for more details.





# SREC member shows viewers How Farms Work



**R**yan Kuster didn't set out to make his living as a YouTuber. Back in 2012, when he was still an ag business student at UW-Platteville, he was just looking for something fun to do when he started a YouTube channel and Facebook page dedicated to showing non-rural people about farming. It was a great way to combine his farming background and his love of photography—he'd shoot videos at the family farm near Potosi and then assemble the footage into short videos that explained various aspects of farming, posting

them on his newly created How Farms Work channel.

"It was just for fun at first, and then it became a hobby and then it turned into kind of a full-time job, and now it is a full-time job, plus some," Kuster said.

The easy-to-follow, personable videos began attracting a following that

**"Even now I don't really see this as a for-profit business. I see it as an education."**

**—Ryan Kuster**

grew with each new posting. Kuster recalled the day he sat in a campus building checking his sites and discovered he had reached the impressive milestone of 1,500 subscribers. "I thought, 'Wow, 1,500 is a lot,'" he said.

Indeed it is, but just a few years later, that number has grown to more than 50,000. To date, Kuster has about 400 videos posted on his How Farms Work channel, with more than 18 million hits and 2 million monthly views as of 2016. The Facebook page has close to 24,000 likes, and the YouTube channel has attracted major advertisers such as Chevrolet.

The project grew into a commercial success, but Kuster

has stayed true to his original mission of teaching non-farmers about farming.

"Even now I don't really see it as a for-profit business," he said. "I see it as an education. People are obviously interested in it, so I want to educate them more on what I learned on the farm and in college, because I've taken a lot of what I learned in my ag classes and applied it here."

Kuster's viewers come from all over the globe, although most are from the Midwestern farming states. Among his many followers are teachers who use How Farms Work videos in their classrooms.

**Entrepreneur** Owning and operating a YouTube channel may seem like an unconventional way to make a living, but it's not a surprising career path for Kuster. He's worked all his life, but only once for a boss in a traditional setting, when he had a college internship at Premiere Cooperative in Lancaster.

Kuster grew up working on his grandparents' dairy farm in Potosi. His parents took over the farm in 2014, and the family converted it into a beef and crop farm. Kuster still works on the farm and does much of his How Farms Work filming there.

In high school, he discovered another passion, which he managed to turn into a business as well.

"I took a photography class in high school, got to handle a camera a little bit, and learned how much I loved it," Kuster explained. "I started my own photography business in 2011. I shot everything, but my biggest thing came to be wedding photography. I was doing that while I was still a student and it got me through college."

During that time, Kuster was still creating and uploading How Farms Work videos. After graduating from college in

2015, still undecided about a specific career, he began uploading with more frequency, about three times a week. That's when How Farms Work emerged as a full-time vocation.

"I actually started making a decent living off it the month I graduated," he said.

This past fall, Kuster said he realized his YouTube project had gone from a "decent living" to something much bigger. The site had grown 30,000 subscribers in three months, surpassing another popular farm channel to which How Farms Work has been compared.

"That's when I realized that this is really big—that we're the number-one farm vlog [video blog] in the world, at least that I know of," Kuster said.

**Keeping it Fresh** Kuster constantly uploads new material. He films daily and typically uploads four new videos a week during the farm's busy season and three a week during the slower months.

"I always want to make sure something's uploaded because there are people who routinely log on to YouTube to watch, so I want to make sure there's always fresh content there so they don't stop watching," he said.

Kuster comes up with the topics himself and does almost all of the filming. Coming up with ideas, he said, is easy.

"There's always something going on," he said. "Even if I've already done something, the following year I can always do it again because farming's repetitive."

Content covers a wide variety of farm-related topics, including loading



A sign at the Potosi-area farm where Kuster works identifies it as the site of How Farms Work.

and selling round bales, cleaning the barnyard, and even obtaining a loan from the FSA. Kuster often gets a hand from his girlfriend, Jamie Procarione, who is a familiar face to regular How Farms Work viewers. In fact, "Teaching her to drive a tractor," featuring Jamie and a John Deere, is one of his most popular videos, with more than 400,000 views.

Procarione, a fellow UW-Platteville graduate, had her own "Wow, this thing is really big" moment in Florida this past fall. She was in Epcot Center when she heard someone behind her mention How Farms Work. She turned around and was surprised to be immediately recognized as the Jamie from the videos.

"They told me that they always watch the videos and they were so excited to

see me," she said. "It was awesome!"

**Still Growing** Kuster has helped expand the reach of How Farms Work by forming new partnerships with sponsors. He also recently added an online merchandise store, more to create awareness and help grow the brand than to make a profit.

His future plans include upgrading the videos, with an eye toward eventually producing movie-like content.

One thing is certain: Kuster won't stop producing content until people stop watching. How Farms Work is a dream job for him, albeit an unexpected one.

"I had imagined it becoming what it is," he said. "I never dreamed that it would." —Mary Erickson

MY CO-OP

Left: Some of the How Farms Work videos contain aerial footage taken with a drone.

Right: Jamie Procarione appears in "Teaching her to drive a tractor," one of the most popular of all the 400 videos posted.





## NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

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- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) E-mail: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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## SAVE THE DATE!

Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative's 2017 annual meeting will be held **Saturday, April 8**, at the Youth & Ag Building in Lancaster, with the business meeting beginning at 9:30 a.m. Watch for the annual report in the March issue of the Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News.



## 2017 Member Photo Contest "Rural Wisconsin"

Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative is holding our annual photo contest for members' photos to be featured in our 2018 calendar. Winning photos may be used in future newsletters or cooperative publications.



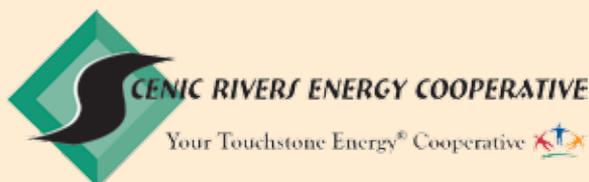
### Photo Contest Criteria:

- Photos must be taken within the Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative service area.
- Photos should capture life in rural Wisconsin (seasons, wildlife, landscape, etc.).
- Photos must have a horizontal (landscape) orientation.
- Photos can be in color or black and white.
- Photos must be high resolution; at least 300 dpi and 8"x10"
- Photos must be emailed to [hpierce@srec.net](mailto:hpierce@srec.net).

### Photo Contest Rules and Details:

- Contest will run from February 1, 2017, until August 21, 2017; however, submitted photos can be taken outside of this date range.
- Three (3) photos per member will be accepted.
- All Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative members 18 years old and over are eligible to submit photos.
- All Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative members under the age of 18 years old is eligible to participate, but must submit a parent/guardian form with entry.
- A completed entry form must accompany each photo.
- Member must own rights to photo.
- SREC employees will determine the winning photos.

**Entry form can be downloaded from our website, picked up at our office, or e-mailed to you.**



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