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# WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* June 2023 NEWS

**VERNON**  
**Electric**  
COOPERATIVE — WESTBY, WISCONSIN  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

## FOR THE LOVE OF DAIRY

TRANSFORMER RULE PAIN,  
LITTLE GAIN

KIDS AND CRITTERS

DAIRY DELICIOUS RECIPES





# CELEBRATING JUNE DAIRY MONTH

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

Wisconsin has long held the title of the “Dairy State,” despite attempts by others to claim it through humorous advertising campaigns like “Happy Cows Come From California.” One could argue Wisconsin’s foundation was built on the hard work of farmers, and the same could be said for electric cooperatives. In fact, without farmers, electric cooperatives may not exist today. Recognizing the needs of rural Americans and the significant impact of agriculture on the economy, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 7037, establishing the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1936.

Incorporated in 1937, Vernon Electric Cooperative energized the farms of Martin Schye, H.R. Vergeroot, and Trygve Ostrem a year later. Interestingly, June Dairy Month was also established in 1937, originally known as “National Milk Month,” to distribute surplus milk during the summer months.

While June Dairy Month is celebrated nationwide, it holds a special significance in Wisconsin. This year, the Vernon and Monroe County Dairy breakfasts will be hosted by Vernon Electric members. The Monroe County Dairy Breakfast will

be held at Mapltwin Farms on June 3, and the Vernon County Dairy Breakfast will take place June 10 at Monument Rock Jerseys. We encourage you to show your support for the dairy industry by attending breakfast at their farms.

Due to time constraints at the March annual meeting, the Vernon Electric and Dairyland Power CEO reports were postponed. After consulting with directors and staff, we decided to host a member appreciation picnic on June 14 at our headquarters facility. As it is dairy month we will provide milk, malts, and cheese curds to go along with pork chop sandwiches and other sides. The relaxed setting will allow us the privilege to provide updates on projects taking place at the cooperative. Brent Ridge, president & CEO of Dairyland Power, will attend as a special guest to share steps taken at Dairyland to ensure sustainable and reliable wholesale power for our members.

While it is unrelated to June Dairy Month, it is important to note 2,000 members were selected at random to complete a mail survey. We partnered with Power System Engineering to assess how we can better serve you. Your feedback and opinions are extremely

valuable as we consider future programs and rate offerings. If you received the survey and have not submitted it, I encourage you to do so prior to the June 16 deadline. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete and your response will enter you into a drawing to win one of ten \$25 bill credits.

### Monroe County Dairy Breakfast June 3

The Peterson Family –  
Mapltwin Farms  
28521 Navajo Road  
Cashton, WI, near Portland

### Vernon County Dairy Breakfast June 10

Gerald & Connie Vesbach –  
Monument Rock Jerseys  
S7303 State Highway 82  
Viroqua, WI, near Liberty Pole



**MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC**

**Wednesday, June 14**  
4:30 – 7 p.m.

**VEC Headquarters**  
110 Saugstad Road, Westby

Pork chop sandwiches, milk, malts, cheese curds & more

Industry updates from Vernon Electric and Dairyland Power CEOs

**Kids' Activities**

**Bounce House**

**Door Prizes**



# 2023 DAIRYLAND DIRECTOR REPORT

by Daniel Korn, Vernon Electric Cooperative Director  
and VEC representative on the Dairyland Power Board

**S**afe, reliable, and sustainable power is a shared vision for Dairyland and its member cooperatives. To ensure electricity reaches your homes and businesses when you need it, Dairyland and its Board of Directors consider the economic impact on members, technological feasibility, social implications, and environmental responsibility when making decisions.

**Safety** is Dairyland's highest priority. To improve its safety culture, Dairyland emphasizes open communication and an environment where all employees are empowered to put safety first. A **People 1st** culture supports safety. Dairyland values employee experience and engagement, and was recently certified a Great Place to Work®.

Dairyland takes a balanced and measured approach in their commitment to reduce its carbon intensity 50 percent by 2030 (from 2005 levels). **Asset reliability and diversification** are essential. To safely meet the region's energy needs, utilities must take an all-of-the-above approach for power plant fuel sources. One fuel type, alone, cannot meet our nation's energy demands.

Construction continues on the 102-mile, 345-kilovolt (kV) Cardinal-Hickory Creek transmission line, which will connect Dubuque County, Iowa, to Dane County, Wis., of which Dairyland is a 9 percent owner. There are currently 115 renewable generation projects totaling 17 gigawatts (1,000,000 kilowatts = 1,000 megawatts = 1 GW) that are depending upon its construction, which would be enough to power millions of homes with clean energy.

As the utility industry lowers its carbon intensity, renewable-enabling natural gas facilities will be crucial to keep the lights on. Throughout the Midcontinent Independent System Operator's footprint, wind and solar provided 15 percent of all the electricity generated in 2022. The balance was covered by coal (35%), natural gas (33%), nuclear (14%), and other (3% – hydro, diesel, biomass, storage, demand response resources). In 2022, both RockGen (Cambridge) and the Elk Mound Combustion Turbines (Elk Mound) set their second-highest generation levels, providing reliable sources of power during times of critical electricity demand.

Last May, the John P. Madgett (JPM) generating station (Alma, Wis.) set a daily gross generation record of 9,625.34 megawatt-hours (MWh), which surpassed the previous record of 9,622.47 MWh set on Feb. 17, 2021, toward the end of a polar vortex. The baseload generation provided by JPM is critical to regional electricity reliability and financially beneficial to Dairyland and its members. Coal is delivered to JPM via train and Dairyland secured a second train set for coal deliveries to maintain sufficient coal levels throughout the year. On Dec. 22, 2022, the Dairyland system set a new winter peak demand of

1,038 MW, and Dairyland was grateful to have fuel available to keep our homes warm during the pre-holiday cold snap.

The Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC) will be a 625-MW combined-cycle natural gas plant in Superior. The proposed plant will be a critical-capacity, renewable-enabling resource to ramp power up and down quickly to adjust for the intermittency of renewable energy generation.

Genoa Station #3's retirement in 2021 aligned with Dairyland's Sustainable Generation Plan to diversify its energy resource mix. Safe demolition and decommissioning at the site will continue through at least 2024. Following the completion of a redevelopment and reuse study in early 2022, Dairyland continues to explore opportunities for site reuse that align with its continued operational needs.

Dairyland and its members continue to cooperate with 18 utility-scale solar projects—many of which include a community solar component—totaling 25 MW with more solar arrays planned to be in-service later this year and in 2024. Vernon Electric Co-op will host a project near Red Mound on the west side of Vernon County. The 1.5 MW solar array will greatly increase local renewable energy production and will have a carve-out for community solar offerings.

**Growth and innovation** will drive the transition to a lower-carbon future. Dairyland signed a memorandum of understanding with NuScale Power to explore nuclear as a non-carbon emitting, 24/7 option through small modular reactor (SMR) technology. NuScale's SMR design is the first approved by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for use in the United States. While this is a step in the right direction, building and bringing such a plant into operation in the Midwest will take at least another decade.

Dairyland and its member cooperatives are national leaders in the establishment of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. Since 2018, Dairyland has supported the installation of over 150 EV chargers throughout its service territory, including three DC fast chargers and two level two chargers in the Vernon Electric service territory.

Being a member of Dairyland Power gives our cooperative's employees access to the services provided by Powered Printing (graphic design, printing and mail services), as well as the expertise of Dairyland's economic development team. This three-person team works closely with member cooperatives on business retention and expansion, attraction and community development initiatives. They collaborated with Dairyland's distribution cooperatives to secure \$5.1 million of economic development financing to support projects for local communities. Locally, Dairyland helped Vernon Electric secure federal low-interest loans and grants which supported Vernon Acres' new assisted living facility in Viroqua, the Coon Valley Fire District with a new fire

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# Horses AS THERAPISTS

By Leah Call

**T**herapy happens on four legs at HorseSense between Coon Valley and La Crosse. This Vernon Electric Cooperative member organization has made a difference in the lives of children and adults with disabilities for more than 30 years. Expanded awareness and participation in recent years enables HorseSense to help even more people.

“Our ridership has grown a lot in the last couple years. More and more people are learning about our program and supporting our mission,” said HorseSense Executive Director Samantha Hall. “It’s been great to see it grow and to see all the people benefit from establishing a unique bond with a horse and what that means to them.”

HorseSense was started in 1989 by an occupational therapist and a physical therapist. After learning about therapeutic horseback riding in the Minneapolis area, they brought the animal-assisted therapy concept to the La Crosse area, initially working with a small number of children with disabilities. The 501c3 grew slowly over the years to include adult participation and in 2019 added the HorseSense for Heroes program, focused on military veterans suffering from PTSD and other mental and physical disabilities.

## Lessons in Riding

HorseSense offers individual and group sessions. Around 75 riders participate in one or more of the 10-

week sessions held in spring, summer, and fall. “The bulk of the ridership comes from the La Crosse area, but we’ve had people come from all over,” said Hall. “Therapeutic riding is kind of a niche industry. There are not a lot of barns that do it. So people will travel to come to us. It’s been nice to expand our reach and help people even outside of our area.”

In addition to the multi-week lessons, HorseSense offers one-time group rides for organizations, families, and veterans. The group outings typically take place on weekends. Hall recommends group rides as an introduction to the program.

“Come out for an afternoon, get a tour, spend some time tacking and riding—to just kind of try it out before committing to riding in a session,” said Hall.

The therapeutic riding lessons are tailored to unique needs of each rider. After registering for lessons, riders and their family members meet with staff to discuss their unique situation and goals. “We introduce them to their horse and prepare them for the lessons and how we can best set up the lesson to meet the needs of that person,” said Hall.

Riders choosing group lessons are paired with riders with similar situations and goals. “If it is a private lesson, we will focus entirely on their objectives and reasoning for coming to ride,” said Hall.

HorseSense employs four full-time staff including a lead instructor. All instructors are PATH certified and trained to work with



HorseSense Executive Director  
Samantha Hall

a wide variety of disabilities. PATH stands for Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, a stringent certification process that ensures the safety and effectiveness of the equine-assisted therapy experience.

## Magic Happens Here

Horsemanship provides a multitude of physical and mental health benefits. Physical benefits include hand-eye coordination, improved reflexes, stamina, and range of motion. “You can’t really replicate the muscle stimulation from riding a horse in other forms of physical therapy,” added Hall.

The nine therapy horses at HorseSense have an important job—and they are up to the challenge. Each horse meets strict criteria required to be a therapy horse. They must be healthy and trained to walk, trot, and canter. While horses by nature are flight animals, therapy horses cannot scare easily.

“Therapy horses are really tricky to find. The most important thing is their demeanor,” said Hall. “They have to be able to work with a variety of different riders and be calm, cool, and collected throughout the lesson.”

The majority of horses at HorseSense come from individuals who reached out to staff with a horse in mind for the program. Hall encourages people to

contact her if they know of a horse that would be a good fit as a therapy horse.

“Horses are such amazing animals. They are very much in tune with emotions and feelings,” said Hall, who likens a horse to a giant mirror. “If you show up to a lesson stressed or anxious, that horse is going to pick up on that feeling.”

As riders get to know their horse, something special develops between them. “That bond is where the magic happens,” said Hall. “I’ve seen the confidence they gain, the skills they are able to foster as they master different horsemanship skills—whether they are working on fine or gross motor skills. We’ve had riders who are non-verbal say their first words during their lesson. It is really amazing to see that connection

with the horse, that sense of security and belonging that allows them to flourish.”

HorseSense operates largely on volunteers and donations. Volunteers are welcome to assist with lessons and care for the horses. Check out the website, [horsesensewi.org](http://horsesensewi.org), and HorseSense Facebook page to learn more about this unique organization.



## Dairyland Report

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truck, and a Vernon Electric economic development loan fund.

Dairyland also takes a balanced and measured approach to its **financial and competitive strength**.

In 2022, Dairyland was \$15 million under budget through fuel management and divisional cost control, which helped offset increased power market prices.

Unfortunately, electric cooperatives

are not immune to the effects of increased fuel prices, early power plant retirements, supply-chain congestion, increased equipment costs, and international unrest. In response to inflationary pressures, Dairyland was forced to implement a 5.63 percent average wholesale rate increase to its member cooperatives, including Vernon Electric Cooperative, effective Jan. 1, 2023.

Just like directors are elected from our membership to govern Vernon Electric Cooperative, the same applies

to Dairyland’s Board of Directors. I’ve had the privilege of being a director of Vernon Electric Cooperative for 20 years and have been proud to serve as your representative on the Dairyland board for 19 years. As your representative on the Dairyland Board of Directors, I assure you the board meets every month with you—our members—top of mind. We bring the voices of our cooperatives to Dairyland and make sure decisions will keep the lights on for you and your community.

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