



## VERNON ELECTRIC ACQUIRES SOLAR GENERATION FACILITIES



by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

Several years ago, Vernon Electric Cooperative entered into agreements with a developer called Clean Energy Collective, LLC (CEC) to construct, own, operate, and maintain the first Community Solar Array in the state of Wisconsin. It was a 1,001 panel, 305kW array. CEC then entered into Solar Interest Purchase Agreements with nearly 115 Vernon Electric Co-op members participating in the community solar program. Under those subscription agreements, the members own the generating output of specific solar panels. Members then sell the output to the cooperative in exchange for credits on their bills.

We recently learned of Clean Energy Collective's intent to file bankruptcy and discontinue operation of the solar farm. The cooperative was able to negotiate favorable terms and conditions and has purchased the Solar Farm from CEC. We will continue operating the community solar program under substantially the same terms and conditions as applied before. This will likely be a more favorable arrangement for members, especially since members will only have to deal with the cooperative going forward.

At the same time the community solar facility was installed, Clean Energy Collective constructed an 1,813 panel, 517kW array adjacent to the community solar facility. CEC owned and operated the facility and had a power purchase agreement with Dairyland Power. The cooperative took advantage of the opportunity to take over ownership and operations of this array also. Energy sales to Dairyland Power from this facility will be used to offset purchased power expenses and will benefit all members of the cooperative by providing

economical, clean, sustainable, and local renewable energy.

Ownership and operations of renewable generating facilities is a new concept for the cooperative. The transition

has gone smoothly and will likely pave the way for future projects.

You can see both array fields, especially the larger one, next to our office building along Hwy. 27 near Westby.



1,813 panel, 517kW array next to our office along Hwy. 27.



1,001 panel, 305kW Community Solar Farm.



# OCTOBER IS CO-OP MONTH – PLAY AND WIN!

Since we can't have our usual Open House & Picnic this year to celebrate Co-op Month, we decided to do something different that will still be fun but avoids gathering people together.

We've put together questions that relate to our co-op. Fill out the answers as best you can. Every member who returns the quiz will be entered into a

drawing for twenty \$25 bill credits. The member who gets the most answers right will win a MECO Deluxe Electric Cart Grill. In the event of a tie, a drawing will be held to determine the winner. Entries



are due by the end of the day on Monday October 19, 2020. You can return the quiz by:

- Putting it in our drop box at our office in Westby
- Mailing it in
- Emailing it to info@vernonelectric.org
- Remember to include your name, phone number, and email address

<p><b>1</b> Which president signed the executive order that created the Rural Electrification Administration? </p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>Bonus question:</b> In what year did he sign it? _____</p>	<p><b>8</b> When is National Line Worker Appreciation Month? _____</p>	 <p><b>16</b> What is the name of this natural attraction located in Vernon Electric's service area? _____</p>
<p><b>2</b> What year were the first farms connected to Vernon Electric's lines? _____</p>	<p><b>9</b> How many years is an electric lineman apprenticeship? _____</p>	
<p><b>3</b> Who is Vernon Electric Co-op's board president? _____</p>	<p><b>10</b> Will Vernon Electric know your power is out, even if you don't call? _____</p>	<p><b>17</b> Who is the general manager &amp; CEO of Vernon Electric? _____</p>
<p><b>4</b> How many cooperative principles are there? _____</p> <p><b>Bonus question:</b> Name one of the cooperative principles. _____</p>	<p><b>11</b> What is the name of this piece of equipment located on power poles? </p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>18</b> What is the name of the online app you can download on a computer or mobile device that gives you access to your account electronically? _____</p>
<p><b>5</b> Which month is National Co-op Month? _____</p>	<p><b>12</b> What is "beneficial electrification?" _____</p>	<p><b>19</b> What is the average number of members Vernon Electric has per mile of power line? a. 5      b. 35      c. 60</p>
<p><b>6</b> This little guy was adopted as the mascot of rural electric cooperatives in 1951. What's his name? </p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>13</b> Who is Vernon Electric's wholesale power provider? _____</p>	<p><b>20</b> What is the line item on your billing statement that helps the co-op pay fixed costs, such as poles, wire, transformers, etc., and is not related to energy use? _____</p>
<p><b>7</b> How many electric cooperatives are in Wisconsin? _____</p> <p><b>Bonus Question:</b> How many in the United States? _____</p>	<p>Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____</p> <p><b>*Entries due Monday, October 19, 2020</b></p>	

# Driftless CHEESE MAKER

By Leah Call

It's lambing time at Hidden Springs Farm. About 100 lambs romp among the more than 600 East Friesian and Lacaune dairy sheep that graze the hills of this idyllic farm in the Vernon Electric Cooperative service territory. For over a decade, Brenda Jensen has been turning the milk from her sheep into artisan cheeses crafted in the homestead creamery she and husband, Dean, built on their 76-acre farm outside of Westby.

After running Hidden Springs Creamery for over a decade, Jensen is still in love with country life, cheese making and her sheep—especially the lambs. “I like to pick up each one and cuddle them; they like to be rubbed on the back,” she said. “I still love that, but I’m not out there as much.”

That's because Jensen follows a tight schedule, first checking on the milking crew in the barn where about 200 ewes are milked twice daily, each giving about 5 pounds of milk. Then she's off to the creamery where her time is spent with inventory, daily maintenance schedules, calibration schedules, sanitation, and sending samples to the lab before she actually begins to make cheese.

“A lot of it has gotten to be more paperwork than cheese some days. I believe in the paperwork though. I believe in good systems,” said Jensen. “There is a lot of paperwork and planning, and then there is some cheese making going on in between.”

## Award-winning cheese

A former corporate manager, Jensen did not envision herself a shepherdess and cheese maker. Then she took a class in artisan cheese making, and she



Hidden Springs farm in Westby, where Brenda Jensen turns the milk from her sheep into artisan cheeses.

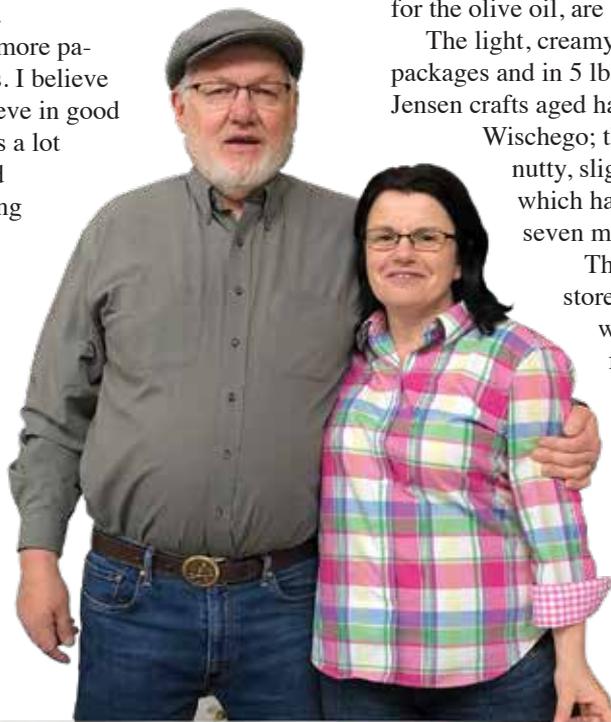
was hooked. Today, Jensen utilizes about 200,000 pounds of sheep's milk annually.

Sheep's milk is protein and vitamin rich. Its high fat content make it ideal for cheese making, and Jensen has perfected the art of transforming this rich, sweet milk into award-winning cheeses. Hidden Springs Driftless brand cheeses have won awards at cheese competitions since 2007. Driftless cheeses are sold in six unique flavors: Basil & Olive Oil, Cranberry & Cinnamon, Tomato & Garlic, Maple, Pumpkin, and Honey & Lavender. All ingredients used in the cheeses, except for the olive oil, are sourced locally.

The light, creamy Driftless cheeses are sold in 5 oz. retail packages and in 5 lb. quantities to restaurants. Additionally, Jensen crafts aged hard cheeses, including the manchego-style Wischego; the semi-hard Bad Axe cheese; and the nutty, slightly grainy Ocooch Mountain cheese, which has grabbed either first or second place in seven major cheese competitions.

The hand-crafted fresh and aged cheeses are stored in a large cooler beneath the creamery, which is built into a hillside about 200 feet from the milking barn. Jensen encourages anyone who hasn't tasted sheep's milk cheese to give it a try. “What differentiates us from cow milk cheese is flavor—very distinctive, very healthy, and higher in protein.” *(Continued)*

Dean and Brenda Jensen with some of their award-winning Hidden Springs Driftless brand cheeses.





Brenda Jensen loves country life and working with her sheep, especially the lambs.



### Sustainable and local

Avoiding pesticides and fertilizers and using draft horses instead of tractors, the Jensens are proud of the sustainable practices on their farm.

“And we make the cheese right here as well. I wish everyone locally would buy the cheese, so we wouldn’t have to send it to California on a truck,” added Jensen. “I would like to just cover everyone here locally.”

Hidden Springs Creamery uses national distributors, but the cheeses can be purchased at food cooperatives in Viroqua and La Crosse, and at Metcalfe’s Market and Willy Street Co-op in Madison.

Jensen stresses the importance of buying local—especially with the economic pressures caused by COVID-19. And while the pandemic may have slowed sales a bit, she will persevere out of sheer passion for her craft.

“I still love the smell of the cheese, the taste of a fresh curd. I can’t think of anything else I would rather be doing.”

### Line Department Update October projects:

- Finishing up the replacement of a three-phase overhead line to an underground three-phase line along Burr Ridge, from the Hillsboro Substation (Hwy 33) to just south of Valley (about 7 miles)
- Finishing up the replacement of approximately 4 miles of single-phase overhead line to a single-phase underground line along Jore Rd. on Lovaas Ridge between Westby and Coon Valley

SAFETY CORNER

## HOW SMART IS A Smart Thermostat?

MYTH VS FACT

<p><b>My thermostat automatically saves me money.</b></p>		<p>That depends on how it’s programmed and your preferences. It still uses the same amount of energy to reach and maintain temps.</p>
<p><b>A smart thermostat is smart straight out of the box.</b></p>		<p>The thermostat needs a little time to learn your heating and cooling preferences.</p>
<p><b>My thermostat is only as smart as I am.</b></p>		<p>Sort of. Most models are independent thinkers and adjust the temperature if no one’s home.</p>
<p><b>It’s creepy, my smart thermostat seems to know when I’m home.</b></p>		<p>It’s smart for a reason! Geotechnology syncs your thermostat with your arrival. Some models use geofencing technology that tracks your smart phone location and kicks on when you’re nearby.</p>
<p><b>My smart thermostat makes me smarter.</b></p>		<p>We’ll give you this one! It can help you save money and make your home more efficient.</p>

LEARN MORE

Safe Electricity.org®

### Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

110 Saugstad Road, Westby, WI 54667  
 608-634-3121 • 608-447-5051  
 email: info@vernonelectric.org  
 website: www.vernonelectric.org

### David Maxwell, Editor



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