

Electric Cooperatives: Investing in Our Community

As a member of a cooperative, such as St. Croix Electric Cooperative, I feel confident that others have my best interest at heart. When community members unite for a common objective, we are able to achieve goals that would otherwise be out of reach. The adage, power in numbers, holds true. Cooperatives make it possible for those of us in our rural area with common interests to collaborate and work together rather than compete with one another. Our rural community is stronger because the cooperative keeps the money local. Distributing money through dividends puts the dollars back into the hands of the members who in turn put it back into business and farming operations in our community. It's a win-win.

Our family has benefited directly from the presence of St. Croix Electric Cooperative in our community. We power heat lamps, run exhaust fans, power electric fences, and light barn aisles. Every single day we count on our well running to fill water tanks. Without the electricity to run the pump there would be no water and the results would be disastrous. A few years ago a powerful storm went through, cutting service to our farm for some time. Most people worried about how they would keep freezers cold and flush toilets. While those were concerns for our family as well, our first thought was how we would be able to water the animals. It really put into perspective how connected we are to our power supply and how reliant we are on St. Croix Electric Cooperative. During trying times like those, it is comforting to know that your electricity is coming from a cooperative owned by people in your community who care about you and your livestock. The business office is staffed by our neighbors. The cooperative business is consumer-owned so you know that members will be looking out for your best interest. The cooperative is not-for-profit so decisions will be made to benefit the community, not simply to garnish the highest profit for a CEO. We order our bulk feed for our animals from Countryside Cooperative. We can count on it being delivered

when we need it, our dollars go back into our own community, and in doing so jobs are provided for our neighbors. Countryside Cooperative has even bid on my livestock at the St. Croix County Fair, thereby helping to fund my college savings account.

At the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association Youth Leadership Congress in July 2019, I had the unique opportunity to learn about the purpose and role that cooperatives play in our lives. It was a tremendous opportunity to develop my leadership skills while working with others from across the state. During our time together we began to understand how crucial cooperatives are to our state and our future. It is up to our generation to make good decisions, as the adults before us have done, to ensure that cooperatives continue to have a positive impact on our communities. While at the Leadership Congress, I chose to run for the Youth Board because of my strong desire to promote the positive role that cooperatives play in our lives. Having grown up on a farm, I have felt the impact of cooperatives and I wanted to share my experiences with others. It was an amazing experience and just one more example of the positive impact cooperatives have on youth in our communities.

One way in which cooperatives could further reach the community is through the school system. I believe that partnerships between cooperatives and area schools would be extremely beneficial. Much of what cooperatives exemplify would fit seamlessly into the curriculum for grades K-12. Young students could learn about community helpers and cooperation, important aspects of every cooperative. Older students could focus on marketing and the financial side of cooperatives including dividends, profit sharing, operation costs, and beyond. An added benefit to partnering with schools would be the fact that more youth would understand the importance of cooperatives in our communities. This would result in better informed adults who would be much more inclined to support cooperatives in the future.

My childhood has been spent on our farm, cooperating with neighbors, collaborating best-practice ideas, and sharing what we have with others when they are in need. The philosophical ideals of a cooperative have certainly shaped my character and led me to pursue a career that will meld my love for my community with my passion for agriculture. As someone who has benefited personally from a cooperative, I can tell you without a doubt that cooperatives are important to my future and the future of rural Wisconsin.