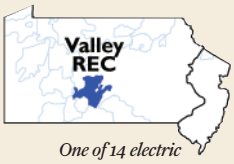
Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
10700 Fairgrounds Road
P.O. Box 477
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477
814/643-2650
1-800-432-0680
www.valleyrec.com

CORPORATE OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Friday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

HUNTINGDON/MARTINSBURG/SHADE GAP OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

OUTAGES & EMERGENCIES

1-800-432-0680

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Cooperatives: The fabric of our communities

by Wayne Miller
President & CEO

LAST YEAR, the U.S. Senate — building on similar action by the United Nations General Assembly — designated 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives. As a result, cooperatives everywhere are celebrating our unique, not-for-profit, member-owned and -controlled business model.

If you've read this magazine before, or our co-op newsletter, *Valley News*, then you know Valley REC is an electric cooperative. That means you and everyone else who receives electric service from us is a member, not just a customer. Because you and your fellow members have a voice in how Valley operates, our top priority remains providing safe and reliable service, and keeping your electric bills affordable.

Local control also means we're in the business of improving the quality of life in the communities we serve, from offering college scholarships to advice on how you can make your home or business more energy efficient.

This probably comes as no surprise, but electric co-ops are just one type of cooperative operating in America. Dairy cooperatives produce nearly 90 percent of our nation's milk. Credit unions are cooperatives, too, with more than 8,000 across the country serving 91 million consumers. You can also find housing, hardware, even funeral service co-ops throughout the United States.

Some agricultural marketing cooperatives have become household names, such as Sunkist fruit, Ocean Spray juice and Blue Diamond nuts.

Together, these cooperatives play a key role in our local economy. We provide good jobs to folks who live right here — your neighbors and friends. We deliver goods and services that keep our communities humming. We're happy to lend a hand when we're able, and we enjoy being involved with schools and community organizations.

At Valley REC, we return any excess profits, called margins, to you in the form of capital credits refunds. That money then gets reinvested locally, perhaps at a grocery store or other retail outlet, which in turn allows the owners to keep local people working.

Cooperatives are not a new concept in this country. Benjamin Franklin started the first co-op in the United States, the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire, in 1752. (And it still operates today!)

For more than 250 years, the cooperative form of business has been an integral part of daily life in America. And our hope is, with continued focus on sound business practices and a commitment to excellent service, co-ops like Valley will help shape this country for many centuries to come.

Sweet Season

While others prepare to plant, one co-op family enjoys harvest

By Susan R. Penning
Director of Member Services

"WE CAN FEEL IT in our bones ..."

That's how Valley REC member Clair Grove describes his family's ability to predict when it's time to harvest syrup from their maple trees.

During a season when most folks are holed up inside, eagerly awaiting spring, Clair and an army of family and friends get busy placing about 1,300 taps in sugar maple trees throughout his farm and neighborhood near Hesston, Huntingdon County.

Each year, the Grove family sells hundreds of gallons of maple syrup to local stores and to customers who visit their farm.

"We can usually expect our first 'crop' around the first week of January," Clair says. "Our season can last up to a month, depending on the weather. The key is to have cold nights and daytime temperatures that reach into the low 40s. That combination seems to offer us the best yield."

THE SWEET STUFF: After maple sugar water has gone through a process of being "cooked down" and filtered, it's ready to be bottled and sold as maple syrup.

Picking the 'fruit'

Clair and his crew begin the process of making maple syrup by collecting sugar water from the tap holes they've drilled into nearby maple trees. The four species typically used to produce syrup are: sugar maple (hard maple) *Acer saccharum;* red maple (soft maple) *Acer rubrum;* silver maple (soft or cut-leaf maple) *Acer saccharinum;* and boxelder (Manitoba maple) *Acer negundo.*

ABOVE: With the help of family and friends, Clair and Carol Grove harvest hundreds of gallons of maple syrup annually.

LEFT: A bucket collects the sugar water from a tapped maple tree.

ABOVE: Sugar water flows into troughs where it is heated. The excess water evaporates, resulting in heavy syrup. It takes about 40 gallons of sugar water to produce one gallon of syrup.

RIGHT: Clair shows what the inside of a maple tree looks like when it is tapped for sugar water. He recommends placing tap holes at least two inches apart to protect the health of the tree.

"The sugar water is the fruit of a maple tree, just like the apple is the fruit of an apple tree," Clair points out. "If you do it right, you could realistically tap the same maple tree for 100 years and not damage it."

Clair explains the difference between a maple tree's sugar water and its sap.

"Sap is the life blood of the tree and it essentially starts flowing when spring is near and the tree begins to grow again. You don't want to tap a tree and get sap. Understanding how and when to tap a maple tree is very important to avoid getting sap and damaging the tree."

LEFT: Jim Grove, Clair's son, drills a tap hole in a maple tree along Route 26 near Hesston, Huntingdon County.

Processing the sweets

After Clair's crew drills tap holes and collects the sugar water (in buckets and tanks), the water is delivered to a place on the family farm that Clair calls "sugar camp."

At sugar camp, the sugar water is emptied into a 4,500-gallon holding tank. From there, it travels through a straining process to remove bark and particles. It passes through an ultraviolet light that kills any bacteria and is then distributed into wide troughs where it is heated above the boiling point of water. The design of the troughs allows for maximum evaporation, leaving only a thick, sweet syrup behind. The syrup is strained again and then poured into quart bottles, ready for sale.

Clair says it typically takes about 40 gallons of sugar water to make one gallon of maple syrup.

Passing the torch

The tradition of making maple syrup is a long one for the Grove family.

"My grandfather, Benjamin Grove, was the first commercial producer of maple syrup in Huntingdon County," Clair points out. "He started harvesting it in 1942 and kept at it nearly every year – except for taking time away to fight a war or two."

Clair has since passed the business on to his son, Steve, the current owner of the Grove's maple syrup operation.

The Groves sell their 100 percent pure maple products from their farm at 4923 Groveview Lane, Hesston. You will also find their syrup at the Saxton Market and Brenneman's Meat Market, with locations in Huntingdon and Mount Union. For more information, call 814/658-3678.

How to buy an energy-efficient appliance

YOU NEED A NEW REFRIGERATOR and you're on a tight budget, so you pick out the model with the lowest sticker price. Is that really the smartest purchase?

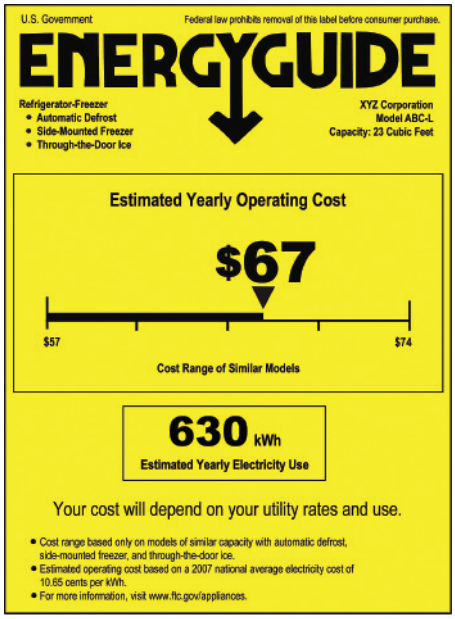
Not necessarily. If you buy the lowest-priced refrigerator, you may end up spending more than if you buy a more expensive one. That's because the cost of owning a home appliance is based on three components: the initial purchase price, the cost of repairs and maintenance, and the cost of operation.

To figure out how much you'll spend over the lifetime of the appliance, you should compare all three factors. The appliance with the lowest initial purchase price, or even the one with the best repair record, isn't necessarily the one that costs the least to operate. Here's an example of how an appliance's energy consumption can affect your out-of-pocket costs:

Suppose you're in the market for a new refrigerator/freezer. Different models of refrigerators with the same capacity can vary dramatically in the amount of electricity they use. For one popular size and configuration, for example, the annual electricity consumption varies across models from a low of about 600 kilowatt-hours per year to a high of more than 800 kilowatt-hours a year. That means the annual cost to operate this refrigerator can range from about $50 to $70, depending on which model you buy.

A $20 difference in annual operating costs might not sound like much. But remember that you will enjoy these savings year after year for the life of the appliance, while you must pay any difference in purchase price only once. As a result, you may actually save money by buying the more expensive yet more energy-efficient model.

You can learn about the energy efficiency of an appliance by studying its yellow-and-black EnergyGuide label. The Federal Trade Commission's Appliance Labeling Rule requires appliance manufacturers to put these labels on refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, washing machines, water heaters, furnaces, boilers, central and room air conditioners, heat pumps, and pool heaters.



When you shop for one of these appliances in a dealer's showroom, you should find the EnergyGuide label either hanging on the inside of the appliance or secured to the outside. The law requires that the label specify:

- Capacity;
- Estimated annual energy consumption (for refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, washing machines and water heaters);
- Energy-efficiency rating (for air conditioners, heat pumps, furnaces, boilers and pool heaters); and
- The range of estimated annual energy consumption — or energy-efficiency ratings — of comparable appliances.

Some appliances may also feature the Energy Star logo, which means the appliance is significantly more energy efficient than the average comparable model.

To compare how updating appliances and making other changes around your home can impact your electric bill, visit www.valleyrec.com and follow the Save Energy tab to the Home*Energy*Suite.

Source: Federal Trade Commission (FTC), U.S. Department of Energy. Susan Penning contributed.

Shopping strategy

1. Select the size and style. Measure the space the appliance will occupy to be sure your new purchase will fit. Make sure you'll have enough room to open the door or lid fully and that you have enough clearance for ventilation. This may help you narrow your choices as you settle on the best capacity and style.

2. Know where to shop. Appliance outlets, electronics stores and local retailers carry different brands and models. Dealers also sell appliances through print catalogs and the internet.

3. Compare the performance of different brands and models. Ask to see the manufacturer's product literature. Decide which features are important to you. Ask questions about how the different models operate: Are they noisy? What safety features do they offer? What about repair histories? How much water do they use? How energy efficient are they?

4. Estimate how much the appliance will cost to operate. The more energy an appliance uses, the more it will cost to run. Consult the EnergyGuide label to compare the energy use of different models. The difference on your monthly electric bill can be significant, especially when considered over the 10-to-20-year life of the appliance. You could save money over the long run by choosing a model that's more energy efficient, even if the purchase price is higher.

5. Ask about any special mail-in rebates or discount offers. Often, if you buy more than one appliance at a time, retailers will offer a deep discount for the "package" deal.

Source: FTC