NEBRASKA Magazine

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March 2024

PROTECT NEW TREES

Inside:

• Farm of the Future • Powering Economic Development in Communities Nationwide • Spring Cleaning Tips to Maximize Efficiency

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Telling the story of Rural Nebraska

Volume 78
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Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub or something else, it's helpful to consider how it's going to grow over the next 20 or 30 years. See related article on Page 6. Photograph by Ian MacDonald

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Editor's Page

Wayne Price

The Silent Threat Lurking in Your Home

Most people don't think about the clothes dryer as being scary or potentially dangerous lurking inside the home. Unfortunately, clothes dryers cause over 20,000 house fires every year, resulting in millions of dollars in damage. You can protect your family and your home by doing a little regular cleaning and maintenance.

It doesn't matter if you have an electric or gas clothes dryer, you will have dryer lint. Lint will build up in the lint trap, but it will also collect inside the dryer vent and ductwork. This can cause a reduction of air flow and drying efficiency. Lint is also responsible for causing humidity levels to increase around vents and ductwork which can cause mildew and mold to develop in walls and insulation.

The most important thing to remember about lint is that it is combustible. Lint causes fires.

Luckily, getting rid of dryer lint is simple. You probably already clean the lint trap after every load. If you don't do this, start right away. If the screen appears clogged, possibly from using dryer sheets, submerge the lint screen in hot water and clean the screen with a bristle brush to get rid of all the fabric softener residue.

It's a good idea to unplug the dryer and check the connection between the exhaust vent and the dryer at least once a year. You'll probably need a screwdriver or pliers to remove the clip or steel clamp that holds the exhaust hose in place. Reach inside the dryer opening or use the vent brush to clean out as much lint as possible. Wipe away any remaining lint from around the connection with a damp cloth. Do the same thing with the exhaust hose.

If you still have a white or silver vinyl duct hose, it should be replaced immediately. It is flammable and if ignited by the dryer it will burn and cause a house fire. All national and local building codes now require metal ducting for clothes dryers. The best exhaust vent material is rigid aluminum tubing pieces that can be connected to reach the exhaust vent on the outside of the home. This type of tubing is better at resisting the build-up of lint and is not easily crushed. Flexible aluminum ductwork is another option but it tends to collect more lint.

Do not forget to clean up the exterior vent. Like before, clean up as much lint as you can with your hand or vent brush. You may have to remove a vent flap or hold it open with a screwdriver. This vent should be cleaned several times per year.

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SCAN ME

Guest Editorial

Gwen Kautz

Gwen Kautz is the General Manager of Dawson Public Power District, headquartered in Lexington, Nebraska

Hybrid Horizons for Rural Nebraska

In the past few years, electric vehicles (EVs) have gained popularity. However, it's important to recognize the significant benefits that plug-in hybrids also bring. There are three main types of hybrid vehicles: full hybrids, mild hybrids, and plug-in hybrids. I recently purchased a hybrid vehicle and began my pursuit to understand how I could maximize my fuel mileage. This article explores the advantages of hybrids, offering a perspective for those seeking eco-friendly transportation.

My car is labeled a "mild" hybrid, but it can also be plugged in. As the name suggests, a mild hybrid system is not designed to solely power the vehicle using electric energy. Its primary function is to augment the gasoline engine, especially during acceleration from a standstill. Additionally, it aids in alleviating the strain on the gasoline engine caused by power-intensive features like air conditioning. Some mild hybrids use external charging; but, like mine, also replenish the battery through a combination of power generated by the gasoline engine and energy recaptured during braking, a process known as regenerative braking.

FUEL EFFICIENCY

One of the primary benefits of hybrids is their impressive fuel efficiency, especially in town. By seamlessly switching between the internal combustion engine and electric motor, hybrids optimize fuel consumption. This dual-power approach enhances mileage, making hybrids an ideal option for those seeking to reduce their carbon footprint without compromising on driving range. Let's face it, in rural Nebraska the downside of a full-on EV would be its range.
For my personal hybrid, I can manually switch from hybrid driving to electric or to sport. The electric range on a fully charged battery would allow me to drive only 20 miles. Sport mode uses only the internal combustion engine. When I use sport mode, my fuel mileage is approximately 28-30 mpg. If I engage the hybrid function, the fuel mileage ranges around 40 mpg.

COST SAVINGS

Hybrids offer cost savings in multiple ways. The enhanced fuel efficiency translates to fewer trips to the gas station, resulting in decreased fuel expenses. Additionally, incentives and tax breaks for hybrid owners might be available, making the initial purchase more economical. The regenerative braking system in hybrids captures energy during deceleration, further improving overall efficiency and potentially lowering maintenance costs.

Continued on Page 19

By Scott Flood

Protect New Trees by Putting Them in Safe Places

"Why can't they just leave my trees alone?"

If you've ever wondered that as you've watched a tree-trimming crew change the look of your favorite tree, you'll find the reason in rural Ohio. At a little after 4 p.m. on the steamy Thursday afternoon of August 14, 2003—with everyone's air conditioners cranked up to MAX—a sagging transmission power line in the Buckeye State came in contact with nearby tree branches. In minutes, 45 million Americans and 10 million Canadians had no air conditioning or any kind of electric power.

Transmission lines are a critical element of the U.S. power grid. These lines crisscross North America, some held up by slim poles, while others hang below towers resembling science-fiction robots. The giant wires suspended from both types can carry enough electricity to power more than a million homes, moving it from distant power plants to public power districts and electric cooperatives.

Federal regulators blamed the 2003 blackout on technology that failed to reroute power properly after the transmission line touched the trees. But they also recognized the problem would not have happened if those trees had been a safe distance away from the line. The outage event led to strict rules your public power district and other electric utilities are required to follow to prevent large-scale blackouts.

Public power districts and electric cooperatives are required to document that every piece of equipment and every foot of our power lines are a safe distance from trees and other vegetation. If your home received a visit from one of our tree-trimming crews, it was likely because your trees were closer to power lines than the rules allow, and we are legally required to act.

You have every reason to be proud of your home and yard, and the last thing we want to do is find ourselves altering or removing a prized part of your landscaping. We'd rather help you avoid conflict between electricity and greenery altogether. How? By reminding you to plant your new trees, shrubs, or other vegetation where they won't grow into power lines or other electric equipment.

Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub, or something else, it's helpful to consider how it's going to grow over the next 20 or 30 years. Consider both the eventual height and how wide the canopy of branches is likely to spread.

For example, even small trees and shrubs should be

Trees enhance the beauty of our communities, but they must be kept a safe distance from power lines and other electric equipment. Photograph by Jimmy Conover

planted at least 20 feet from power lines. If you can't plant that far away, make sure you choose a species that won't top out at more than 15 feet high. Trees that will be 40 feet high or less should be at least 25 feet from electricity, and larger trees should be at least 50 feet away.

Thinking about what's above the ground is only part of tree planting safety. Before you grab a shovel and start digging, contact 8-1-1 to ensure you won't accidentally cut into underground utility lines. The service will send people to your property to mark the approximate locations of utility lines. Because it can be challenging to pinpoint exact locations, use only hand tools when digging within a couple of feet of the markings.

Trees aren't the only type of vegetation requiring thoughtful planting. If there's a pad-mounted transformer in your yard, you might be tempted to hide it behind colorful flowers and neatly trimmed shrubs. Unfortunately, if there's a problem, crews will need clear access to the transformer. That's why it's always a good idea to keep plantings at least 10 feet from the transformer's doors and at least 4 feet from its sides. Otherwise, crews responding to a power problem may need to remove part of your landscaping.

Finally, if you notice your trees or other vegetation have grown dangerously close to power lines or equipment, don't reach for your chainsaw and try to trim them on your own. Let your local electric utility know or hire a professional arborist. Tree trimming is more dangerous than most people realize, and you don't want to find yourself in the emergency room—or be the person who plunges your neighbors into the dark!

Electric utilities are required to document that every piece of equipment and every foot of power lines are a safe distance from trees and other vegetation. Photograph by Laura Ribas, Lewis Tree Trimming

Farm of the Future

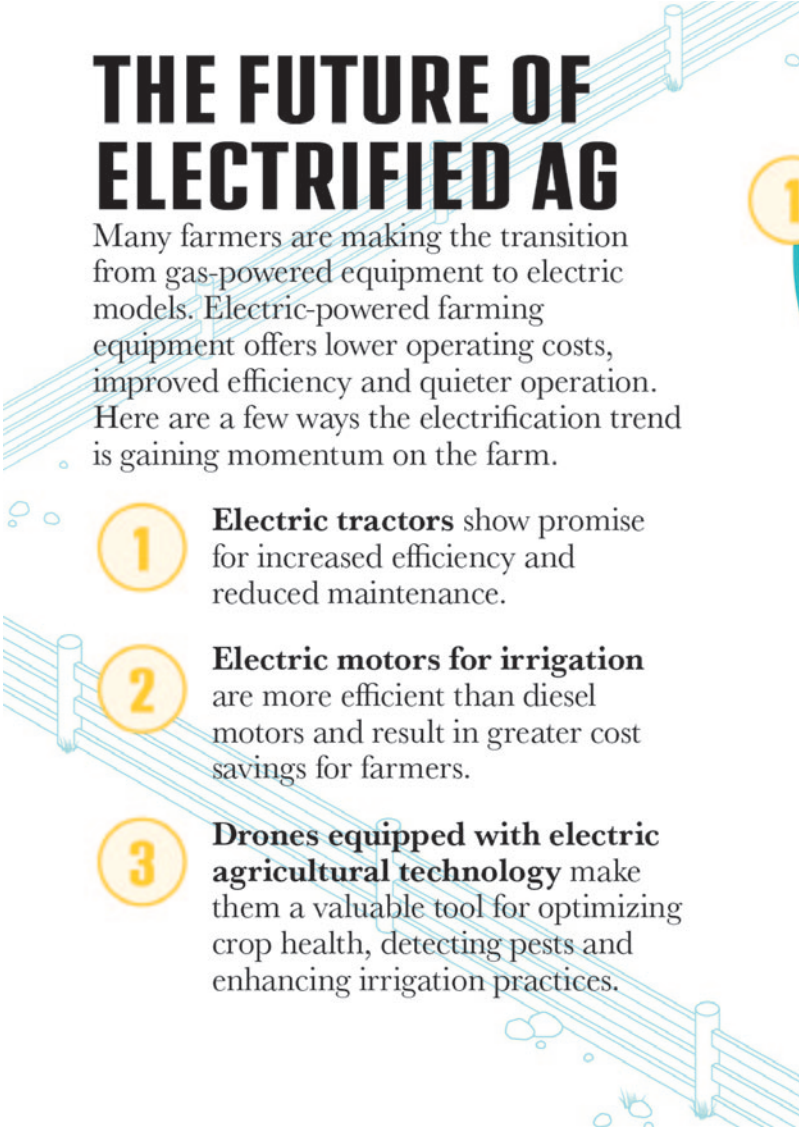
How Electric Tractors and Drones are Revolutionizing Agriculture

The electrification trend in agricultural equipment has gained momentum in recent years as farmers increasingly embrace electric vehicles and machinery. This shift offers numerous advantages, including reduced carbon emissions, lower operating costs, improved energy efficiency and quieter operation.

Smaller electric equipment, such as irrigation systems and utility vehicles, are becoming increasingly popular. Many farmers are now using electric motors in place of older, inefficient diesel irrigation motors for farm irrigation.

Larger agricultural equipment can be difficult to replace with electric alternatives due to their weight. In response, manufacturers are developing tractors that are more compact, lower in weight and feature battery-powered options. The compact and lighter design of these tractors allow for better maneuverability in smaller farming spaces, improving efficiency and productivity in the field. For example, a farmer who owns a small orchard may opt for a compact electric tractor instead of a larger, traditional tractor. The smaller size and electric power allow the farmer to easily navigate between rows of trees without causing damage to the delicate fruit or soil, ultimately increasing the yield and reducing maintenance costs.

In addition to smaller equipment, drones equipped with electric agricultural technology are proving to be valuable in many cases. Electric drones provide farmers with the ability to monitor crops, perform precision spraying and even participate in crop pollination. Equipped with specialized sensors and cameras, these drones capture high-resolution imagery to help farmers make informed decisions about crop management. The versatility and cost-effectiveness of electric drones make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.



Electrified agricultural equipment can be used in various types of farming operations

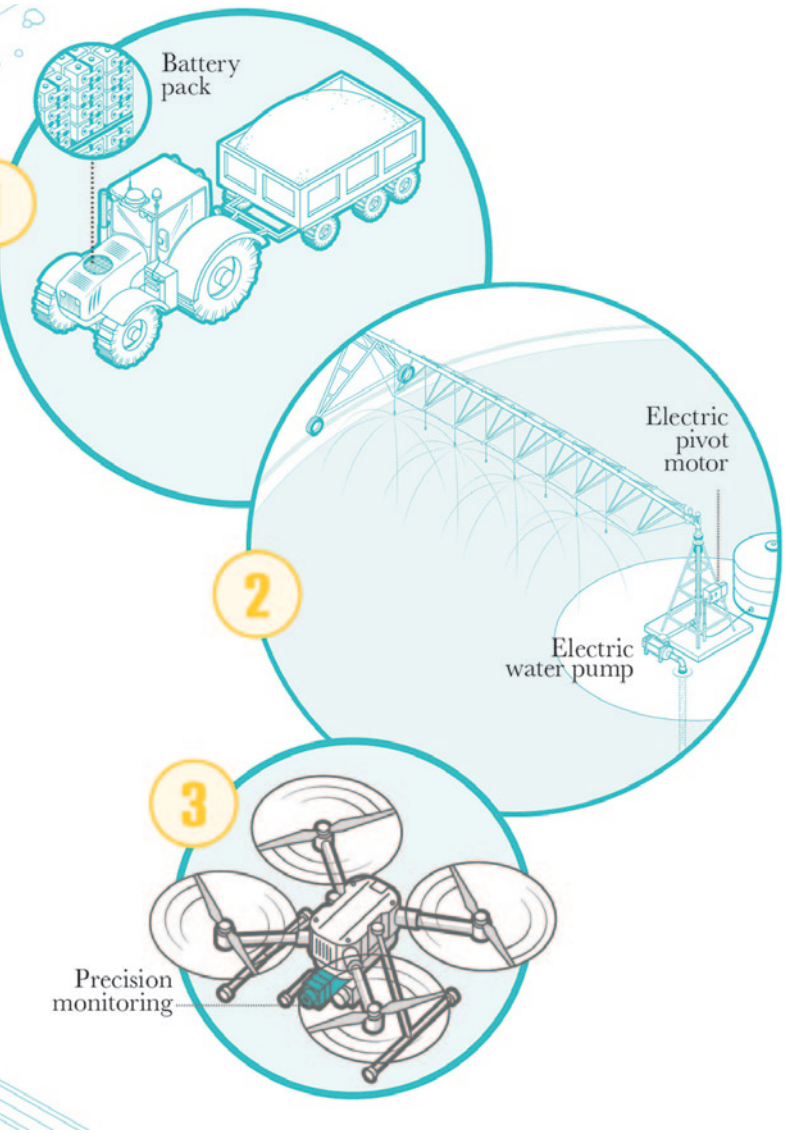
Here are some common types of farming operations that benefit from electrified agricultural equipment.

Crop Farming: Electric equipment such as tractors, sprayers and harvesters are used in crop farming operations for tasks like plowing, planting, spraying pesticides, drying and harvesting crops.

Livestock Farming: Electric equipment can be utilized in livestock farming for tasks such as feeding, milking and waste management.

Vineyards and Orchards: Electric pruning equipment can be utilized in vineyards and orchards for precision pruning of grapevines, fruit trees and bushes.

Greenhouses and Nursery Operations: Electric equipment like tillers, seeders and potting machines are often used in greenhouse and nursery operations for efficient soil preparation, seeding and transplanting.



In 2017, John Deere showcased the first, fully battery-powered tractor. This technological innovation is truly the first of its kind. Nicknamed SESAM, for Sustainable Energy Supply for Agricultural Machinery, this all-electric tractor is modeled after John Deere's 6R Series Tractors.

Organic Farming: Electrified agricultural equipment is also used in organic farming operations, with a focus on sustainability and environmentally-friendly practices. Electric tools and equipment help minimize the use of fossil fuels and reduce emissions.

Benefits of Electrified Ag Equipment

Electrified agricultural equipment offers several benefits beyond reducing carbon emissions.

Electric drive trains are simpler and easier to maintain compared to traditional tractors, resulting in lower maintenance costs. Additionally, electric equipment is more energy efficient, converting a higher percentage of electrical energy into usable work.

Electric drive trains are radically simpler than modern tractors making maintenance cheaper and easier. Electricity flowing through batteries and electric motors is more efficient than diesel being delivered to farms, moved into tanks and burned in diesel engines, and as battery technology continues to advance, further improvements in electric farming equipment are expected.

This efficiency leads to reduced energy consumption and lower operating costs for farmers. Additionally, the quieter operation of electric equipment minimizes disruptions to nearby communities, livestock and wildlife, making it ideal for residential areas or sensitive environments.

Considerations for Farmers

When considering electrified equipment, farmers should evaluate their specific needs, including power requirements and operational tasks. Farmers should work with their local electric cooperative to assess the farm's power supply capacity to ensure it can handle the additional load without causing issues. By conducting a thorough analysis of their unique needs and goals, farmers can determine if adopting electrified agricultural equipment is a suitable and advantageous option.

The electrification of agricultural equipment presents a promising future for farmers. By embracing electric vehicles, machinery and drones, farmers can improve operational efficiency and benefit from cost savings in the long run.

ELECTRIFY AND SAVE®

WORKFORCE HOUSING IN COLORADO'S MOUNTAIN TOWNS

"The cost of housing is astronomical in some of these ski towns, so the ability to house important workers is critical."

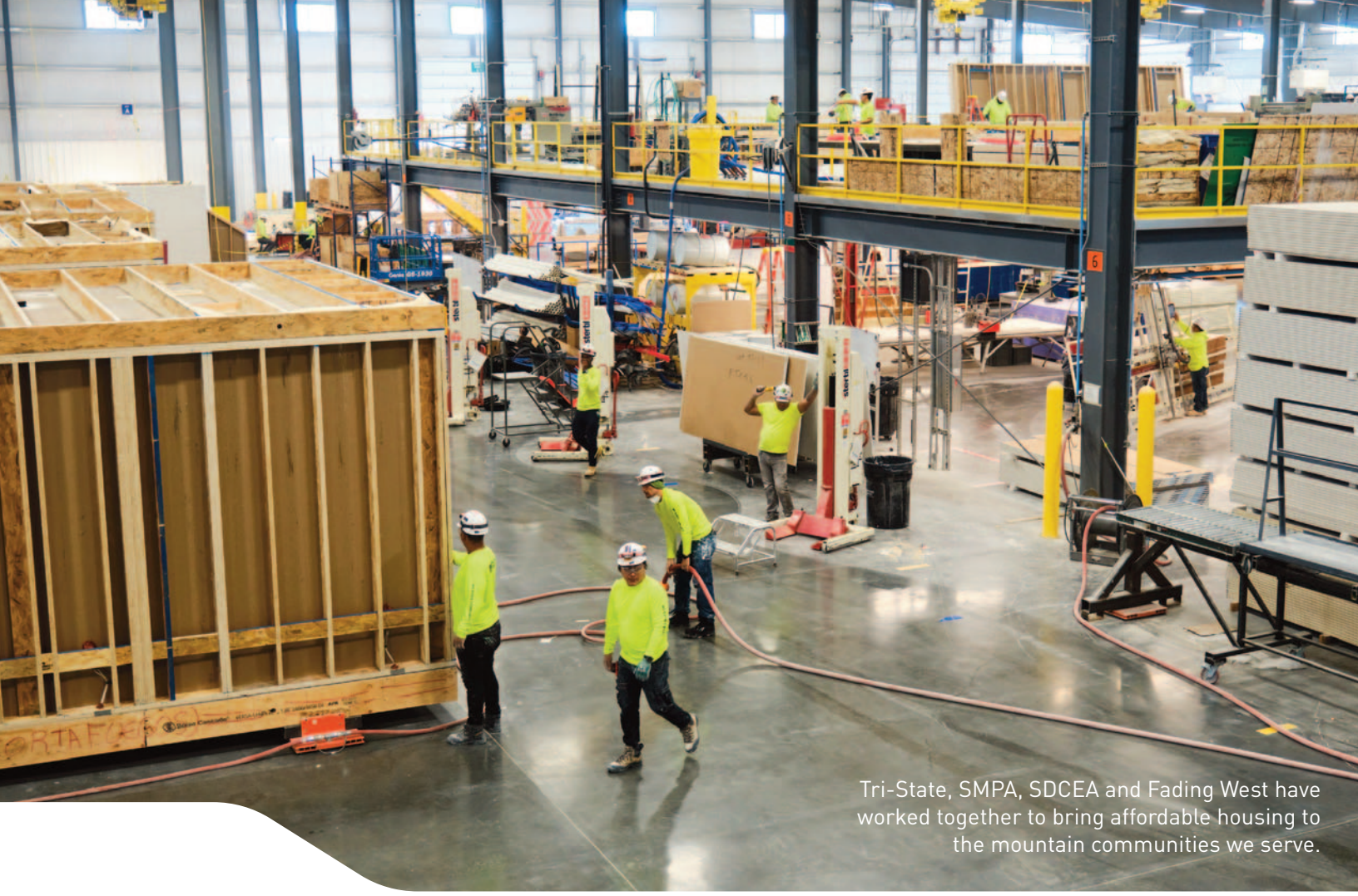
– Phil Zimmer, SMPA member and Energy Services Supervisor

Communities like Crested Butte, Buena Vista, Telluride and Ouray are among the most sought-after destinations in the United States. As a result, property values and monthly rentals in these areas have soared, making housing particularly difficult for essential workers like teachers, healthcare professionals, firefighters, and service industry employees.

After experiencing that problem in their service territory firsthand, San Miguel Power Association decided to take action.

TRI-STATE | A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Tri-State is a not-for-profit power supplier to cooperatives and public power districts in Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico and Wyoming.



Tri-State, SMPA, SDCEA and Fading West have worked together to bring affordable housing to the mountain communities we serve.

BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE SERVICE

Tri-State and San Miguel Power along with funding from multiple organizations, piloted a housing program to assist their end-consumers with more affordable, energy efficient housing solutions. This program integrates donated land, all-electric manufactured home designs and low-cost financing.

Affordable housing stabilizes the local workforce and economy, fosters diverse and inclusive communities and enhances quality of life by reducing the burden of housing costs. Local utilities, partnering with their community and wholesale power supplier Tri-State, make homeownership a reality. That's the cooperative difference.

Read the full story at
www.tristate.coop/rethinking-american-dream-colorados-mountain-towns

NREA's Board Takes a Stand on 14 Legislative Bills

by James Dukesherer, NREA Director of Government Relations

By the time you read this article, this year's 60-day legislative session will be more than half done. NREA's Legislative Committee and Board of Directors, composed of representatives from all of our 34 public power utilities across rural Nebraska, came together last month to review the nearly 600 bills that were introduced this session and to take official positions. Official positions were taken on 14 bills. Here are a few summaries of some of these important bills.

Bills We Support

LB 837- Introduced on behalf of the NREA, would allow public power districts to split voting precincts without regard to population when designing board member subdivisions. This bill would ensure that only those receiving electricity from a power district are able to vote for and serve on its board of directors.

LB 969- Would increase the threshold before a power district has to seek out sealed bids on labor contracts or for the procurement of products. For power districts the size of the NREA membership, the threshold would be increased from $250,000 to $750,000. Costs have increased dramatically in recent years and LB 969 would ensure that every time a power district procures needed equipment, they do not have to go through a muti-monthlong sealed bid process.

LB 1358- It has been nearly 25 years since the board members of public power utilities have received an increase in their allowable pay under state statute. LB 1358 allows for a cost-of-living plus one percent adjustment to be made to these salaries. It is important to note that the bill does not grant board members a pay increase, it only increases the statutorial cap of which they could be paid. Ultimately, any pay increases would be up to each individual board to decide.

LB 1369- Would authorize the use of "agricultural self-generation facilities" for agricultural customers wishing to self-generate their own electricity. The measure would cap the size of these generators at 100 kW and includes language ensuring the utility can properly recover their costs to serve this unique customer. The NREA has heard from a number of agricultural producers that wish to generate some of their own electricity. LB 1369 provides a model for this to happen without forcing other customers to cover the costs of these self-generating consumers.

Bills We Oppose

LB 1218- Among many other components of this measure, LB 1218 would authorize private electric vehicle charging station operators to sell electricity by the kilowatt hour- a right currently reserved for public power only. NREA's opposition to this bill comes from a clause within the bill that requires public power districts to get authorization from private entities before we could install and own an EV charging station. The business of selling electricity is what we do. Public power can already own, install and sell electricity at an electric vehicle charging station. We should not have to get permission to sell electricity in the state as long as we are selling that electricity within our service territory boundaries.

LB 1300- The measure's primary objective is to protect our state and its critical infrastructure from disruptions that could be caused by our country's enemies. NREA's certainly supports this cause. Assessing risk and protecting the critical infrastructure we operate is of the upmost importance. Our concerns with LB 1300 come from the public disclosure of the reports created under this bill. The committee work, reports and publications envisioned under the proposal must be protected to ensure they do not produce a roadmap for those that would do our country harm.

LB 1366- In addition to private entities with condemnation authority, LB 1366 would place additional limits on the condemnation authority of public entities like public power

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By Jim Matheson and Andrew Don

Powering Economic Development in Communities Nationwide

For nearly a century, public power districts and electric cooperatives have been essential to the economic vitality and overall quality of life in communities nationwide. America's electric cooperatives and public power districts made modern living in rural America possible. In the early 1930's nearly 90% of American farms lacked electricity - thanks to public power - by the early 1950's more than 90% of America's farms enjoyed the benefits of co-op provided power. Today, public power districts and electric cooperatives power over 21.5 million businesses, homes, schools and farms in 48 states.

Electric cooperatives are now repeating history by delivering affordable, reliable broadband service – deemed a "modern-day necessity" by the Federal Communications Commission. This new service is creating new ways to live, learn and earn in sparsely populated areas. Today, co-ops deliver broadband service to 675,000 homes and constitute the fastest growing group of broadband providers infusing new economic opportunities to America's rural communities.

Simply put, public power districts and electric cooperatives continue to have a significant impact on the nation's economy. According to a new economic study, they contributed $554 billion to U.S. gross domestic product between 2018 and 2022 for an average of $111 billion annually

For the same five-year period, rural electric utilities generated an average of nearly 623,000 jobs annually for Americans nationwide providing $51 billion in pay and benefits. By comparison, FedEx, the nation's fifth largest private employer, directly employs 547,000 workers worldwide.

Since public power districts and electric cooperatives serve 92% of the nation's "persistent poverty counties," the utility contribution to local economies is particularly critical. Between 2018 and 2022, electric co-ops collectively returned $7 billion to their members, further benefitting the communities they serve.

Much of the economic impact can be traced to investments rural electric utilities made in the nation's infrastructure. Between 2018 and 2022, these investments totaled nearly $409 billion nationwide, including $75 billion on capital expenses, $304 billion in operational costs and $24 billion toward maintenance activities.

These investments are also being used to enhance the reliability of the grid, hasten energy innovation and the deployment of renewable energy. Public power districts and electric cooperatives own more than 1.6 GW of renewable capacity and have long-term power purchase agreements for another 9.8 GW. Using federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, as well as two sustainability bonds totaling $800 million issued by CFC since 2020, rural electric utilities are poised to expanding their efforts to responsibly meet tomorrow's energy needs.

STATEWIDE IMPACT
- $5.1 Billion to Nebraska's Gross State Product (GSP)
- An average of 4,932 jobs in Nebraska each year
- $2 Billion in labor income in Nebraska
- $878.9 Million in state taxes

LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPACT WITHIN COUNTIES SERVED BY CO-OPS AND PPDs
- $4.9 Billion in value added to the local economy
- An average of 4,757 jobs per year in their communities
- $1.9 Billion in local labor income
- $1.5 Billion in local taxes

From 2018 to 2022, the G&T and distribution co-ops and Public Power Districts (PPDs) in Nebraska spent $5 billion on capital investment, operations, and maintenance activities and retired $28 million in capital credits paid to consumer-members. Through these expenditures, co-ops and PPDs drive economic benefits throughout the state, including impacts specifically in the local communities they serve.

The economic benefits of public power underscore the ingenuity of the cooperative model – consumer-owned, community-focused non-profit organizations working to power and empower communities across the nation.

UNMC & Nebraska Medicine: Addressing Nebraska's health workforce shortage

Katie Schultis, a fourth-year University of Nebraska Medical Center student, is from Diller, a town of 250 in southeast Nebraska. Like many rural areas, Diller faces a critical shortage of health professionals.

"Growing up, I was well aware of the limited access many communities in our state have to the care they need and deserve," Schultis says. "That's why, when my education is complete, I'll be going home." Schultis is not alone. Nearly 60% of the physicians, dentists, pharmacists and physician assistants practicing in Greater Nebraska – outside of the Omaha and Lincoln metro areas – were educated at UNMC and received training at Nebraska Medicine, the university's primary clinical partner.

But there is still work to be done. UNMC and Nebraska Medicine, a leading American academic health system, are committed to addressing the growing health care needs of all Nebraskans - UNMC, as the state's only public sciences university, and Nebraska Medicine, as a major clinical partner of UNMC and the primary teaching hospital for the state.

'Leading the world'

In collaboration with the University of Nebraska at Kearney, UNMC has grown in central Nebraska, adding new facilities and expanding programs. This includes a $95 million Rural Health Education Building and medicine, nursing, pharmacy and public health programs.

The expansion builds upon the success of the Health Science Education Complex, which opened in 2019 through a partnership between UNMC and UNK. Due for completion in late 2025, the new project will increase the number of health professions students training in the region by more than 250% and help fill shortages in medical professions around Nebraska.

Kaitlyn Schultis
UNMC College of Medicine, Class of 2024

Kaitlyn Schultis & Edson DeOliveira
UNMC College of Medicine, Class of 2024

"The combined campus in Kearney will be the largest interdisciplinary health care rural training campus in the United States," UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey Gold, MD, says. "It's just another way that Nebraska is leading the world."

When fully operational, the Rural Health Education Building and existing Health Science Education Complex will have an annual economic impact estimated at $34.5 million.

Impacting care for all Nebraskans

Nebraska Medicine, as the primary clinical partner of UNMC, is dedicated to providing health care for all Nebraskans. As a non-profit, integrated health system, its providers care for patients from every county in the state.

Across Nebraska, 70 specialty and primary care clinics offer a wide range of services. This includes 20 satellite clinic locations in towns such as Alma, Broken Bow, Cambridge, Columbus, Cozad, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, North Platte and York.

Nebraska Medicine – like many hospitals across the state – relies on UNMC to grow our health care workforce and on students like Schultis.

"Medical students just like me, from rural communities throughout Nebraska, are getting their education at UNMC and training at Nebraska Medicine," she says. "And like me, they'll be going home to provide much-needed care."

While expanding Nebraska's health workforce is crucial, it's only one step UNMC and Nebraska Medicine are taking in and across Nebraska. Explore this "once-in-a-generation" opportunity for Nebraska at **unmc.edu/next.**

Educated here in Nebraska. Practicing everywhere in Nebraska.

Communities throughout Nebraska receive care from health care providers educated with us.

If you're getting health care anywhere in Nebraska, there's a good chance your provider was educated at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and trained with Nebraska Medicine. We're proud of the knowledge and training we provide countless health care professionals, who settle in communities throughout our state and improve the lives of people and their families.

Learn more about how we're transforming the lives of Nebraskans at **unmc.edu/next.**

UNMC
Nebraska Medicine

Simple Steps for a Safer Workday

How many days do you walk into your workplace, unaware of anything new around you? If you are like most people, probably most days. You walk straight to the break room for some hot java and then to your work area to start your day.

Most of us assume we are safe from on-the-job hazards that can cause incidents, injuries and deaths — yet these things happen every day. Though you may not see or notice them, hazards are present in our workplaces and homes.

Workplace hazards, unless they are obvious (think chemical spill or an obvious trip hazard), can fade into the background or be left for someone else to remedy. However, workplaces that enable every worker — regardless of title or position — to notice and respond to hazards make the workplace safer for everyone. A culture of safety saves lives.

As you go through your workday, consider the workstation, environment, tasks and machinery you use. Also think about distractions or factors such as temperature, lighting or noise. There are also other types of hazards, such as an uncomfortable work chair, a cluttered walkway or equipment that requires a lot of force to operate. Speak up if you notice an unsafe environment or scenario.

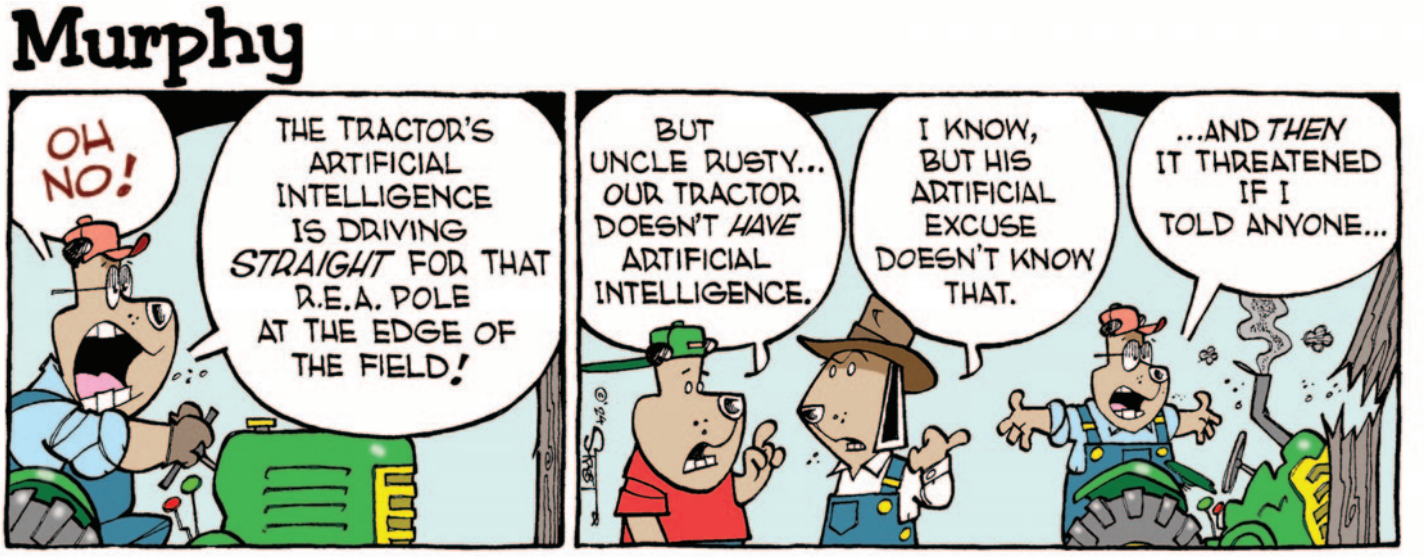
Safety Tip

A safe work environment increases efficiency and productivity, reduces injury and illness costs, boosts morale, decreases employee turnover and builds a stronger, more resilient safety culture.

Everyone's response to hazards is essential for a safe workplace. The NSC recommends taking the following precautionary measures in the workplace:

- Avoid distracted walking.
- Use caution in high-traffic areas, such as doorways and around corners.
- Check workstations for exposed cords.
- Ensure that cups and glasses have spillproof lids.
- Close file cabinet drawers.
- Replace burned-out lighting.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment.
- Know the process for reporting hazards.

Employers should incorporate hazard awareness in the workplace to reduce and eliminate risks. A "find and fix" approach should be part of every workplace safety and health program. This mentality empowers employees to speak up when they see hazards and, in turn, makes the workplace a safer place.



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districts. The use of eminent domain by power districts and electric cooperatives is a tool of last resort, but it is an important tool for the placement of public utility infrastructure. LB 1366 would transfer some of the authority currently held by electric utilities over to the counties, cities, and villages where the condemnation will occur. Public power prides itself on being good stewards of this authority and should not be included within the restrictions of this bill.

Bills in Which We Are Officially Neutral

LB 1370- Would require a public power utility that is retiring a "dispatchable" generation plant to replace that plant with new dispatchable generation and supporting transmission of equal or greater size. NREA finds itself advocating on both sides of this issue. While we consider ourselves staunch advocates for the dispatchable baseload generation that is produced at our coal, nuclear, hydro, and natural gas plants, we also should not support state mandates that take multi-billion dollar decisions, like the building a of new power generation plant, and place these decisions into a one-size fits all model in state statute. These important decisions are best made at the utility, by their staff, engineers, and a publicly elected board that has all of the best available information available to them at the local level as they decide what is best for Nebraska's electric ratepayers.

PLAN WHEN YOU PLANT

WHERE TO PLANT

Trees growing too close to power lines can cause service outages or dangerous situations for you and your neighbors.

Before you grow, get the facts.

- *Know the height your tree will reach at maturity:*
  - *If the mature height is less than 20 feet, the tree will likely fit under power lines and is unlikely to need trimming to protect public safety and service.*
  - *If the mature height is 30 to 40 feet, plant your tree 15 to 20 feet from the outside line of a power pole.*
  - *If the mature height is greater than 40 feet, plant your tree at least 35 feet from your home and remain clear of power lines.*

Energy Sense
by Miranda Boutelle

Spring Cleaning Tips to Maximize Efficiency

Spring is a great time to refresh, clean and enhance energy efficiency at home. By adopting simple yet effective energy-saving strategies during our spring-cleaning routines, we can create an efficient living environment that may also lower our utility bills and extend the life of our heavily used appliances.

Be sure to include these spring cleaning tips to add some energy savings to the job.

Even though it's out of sight, don't leave it out of mind. Check the filter in your HVAC system. Your furnace worked hard during the winter. Ensuring your system has a clean filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency. A dirty furnace filter can cause your system to work harder than necessary, decreasing efficiency and shortening the system's life.

Schedule cleaning services for your air conditioner in the spring before the heat of summer. Photograph by Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources

While the filter is easy to replace yourself, you should have your air conditioning serviced and professionally cleaned. Both the indoor and outdoor units should be cleaned. Dirty refrigerant coils reduce efficiency. This also applies to heat pumps and ductless heat pumps, also known as mini-split systems. The technician can check refrigerant levels and refill or repair if necessary.

HVAC contractors get busy responding to calls for repairs during the summer heat. Scheduling cleaning services for your air conditioning in the spring—before the heat of the summer—can ensure the work gets done before the rush and even save you money. Some HVAC contractors offer special discounts for cleaning services in the milder months, which helps fill their schedules and keep their technicians working.

Window AC units can get dirty, too. They can be cleaned with the proper tools, cleaning agents and know-how. Always unplug before cleaning, and wait until completely dry to plug it back in again. Take the time to clean it properly in the spring before you need it in the summer.

Cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers can brighten your space by removing dust and grime collected during the winter. While you are at it, be sure to check your bulbs and replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent with energy-saving LEDs. Although they tend to cost a little more, LEDs last longer and use less energy.

Good-quality LED light bulbs are expected to last 30,000 to 50,000 hours, according to the Department of Energy. A typical incandescent lamp lasts about 1,000 hours, and a comparable CFL lasts 8,000 to 10,000 hours. To put this into everyday use, if you have an LED light on for 10 hours per day, it can last 13 years compared to only about three months for incandescent bulbs and about two-and-a-half years for CFLs.

Don't forget the oven. A clean oven heats more evenly and quickly, providing better results and lower energy use. A clean oven window allows you to see the food and how it's cooking without opening the oven door, which wastes energy.

If cleaning windows is on the list, check the seals and sash locks to ensure they close tightly. Check for any areas that need caulking or sealing to reduce drafts. Sealing around windows contributes to year-round comfort in your home. Clean windows also allow more light into the home, reducing the need to turn on lamps and overhead fixtures.

Spring is the ideal time to declutter, deep clean and implement practices that not only tidy our homes but also reduce energy consumption, contributing positively to our homes' energy efficiency and saving money on energy use.

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VERSATILITY
Hybrids provide a flexible driving experience, seamlessly transitioning between electric and gasoline power. This versatility eliminates the "range anxiety" often associated with fully electric vehicles. Hybrids can be refueled at traditional gas stations, providing convenience without the need for extensive charging infrastructure (or the time it takes to charge an EV).

SMOOTH DRIVING EXPERIENCE
The combination of internal combustion engines and electric motors in hybrids delivers a smooth and quiet driving experience. Electric power is utilized during low-speed, urban driving, reducing noise pollution and enhancing driver comfort. The automatic transition between power sources ensures a continuous and enjoyable driving experience. There have been several times that I have put my car in park and couldn't tell it was still running. I finally set the car up to turn itself off when I opened the driver's door.

TRANSITION HORIZONS
I knew a pure EV was not for me. Range anxiety is real. Charging while on the road is an issue. For individuals not ready to fully embrace electric vehicles, hybrids provide a transitional path to environmentally friendly driving. Owners of hybrids can ease into eco-friendly features while maintaining the familiarity of traditional gasoline-powered vehicles.

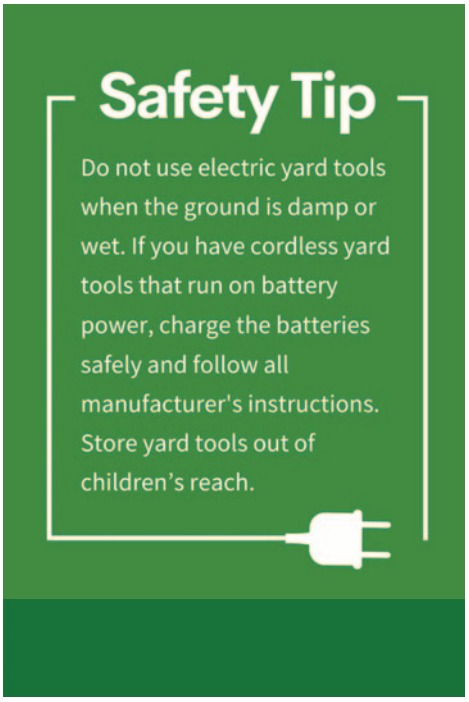
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
While EVs are praised for producing zero emissions during operation, it's important to consider the environmental effects of making them. The manufacturing of EVs requires extracting and processing materials like lithium and cobalt, causing environmental issues. Hybrids, with a less resource-intensive production process, offer a more balanced approach to reducing the overall carbon footprint.

INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGE
While electric grid systems can manage EV charging, public power districts/EV owners might need to consider upgrades (bigger transformer for example). It's not a matter of not having enough power so long as baseload generation plants are operational. Nebraska has seen an unprecedented growth in planned energy loads. This is a very complex issue and will take long range planning.

Adding a private charger to your residential account is affordable because there are available rebates. Check with your electric utility to find out what incentives are currently available.

IN SUMMARY…
If it's time to buy a car/SUV, I hope you'll consider a hybrid. They offer better fuel efficiency, lower emissions, and have become affordable. Choosing a hybrid is a smart and eco-friendly option but it is a personal choice. Recognizing these advantages helps us make well-informed decisions that balance environmental concerns, address volatile gas prices, with practical driving needs in the changing automotive world.

Sources: Car Edge Electric podcast; Patrick George, InsideEVs.com; Plug-in 4 More podcast; WSJ article: "How to Get the Biggest Tax Breaks" by Ashlea Eberling; my car manual, and my own personal experience.



Constructing a Better-for-you Menu

Whether you're encouraging loved ones to start a new wellness kick or looking to add new ideas to an already-nutritious menu, families at any stage of a journey toward better health can use newfound favorites to bring fresh flavors to the table.

These dishes from Milk Means More provide an assortment of deliciousness so you can bring everyone together for tasty, nutritious meals no matter the occasion. Dairy foods, like the low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt and cheese found in these recipes, are fundamental to good nutrition.

Constructing a better-for-you menu calls for a balanced diet with a variety of foods to get essential nutrients. This balance is important for maintaining healthy gut and immune function while optimizing overall wellness.

Fusion cooking is on the menu with the spicy-sweet combo of Cajun-seasoned chicken mingling with mango and pungent blue cheese in these Chicken, Mango and Blue Cheese Pitas. Finally, enjoy Feta Roasted Salmon and Tomatoes – an easy-to-make family meal ready in 30 minutes.

Find additional better-for-you recipe inspiration at MilkMeansMore.org.

Feta Roasted Salmon & Cherry Tomatoes

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 3 cups halved cherry tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano or dried dill weed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper, divided
- 1 1/2 pounds salmon or halibut fillets, cut into 4 serving-size pieces
- 1 cup (4 ounces) crumbled feta cheese

Preheat oven to 425 F. Line 18-by-13-by-1-inch (half sheet) baking pan with foil. Lightly spray foil with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.

In medium bowl, toss tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, oregano, salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper.

Place fish pieces, skin side down, on one side of prepared pan. Sprinkle with remaining pepper. Lightly press feta cheese on top of fish. Pour tomato mixture on other side of prepared pan. Bake, uncovered, 12-15 minutes, or until fish flakes easily with fork.

Place salmon on serving plates. Spoon tomato mixture over top.

Chicken, Mango and Blue Cheese Pitas

Sauce:

- 1 cup low-fat plain yogurt
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon orange juice or lime juice

Filling:

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 tablespoon Cajun or Creole seasoning
- 1 large fresh mango, seeded, peeled and chopped
- 3 large whole-wheat pita rounds (or 6 small), halved
- 1 1/2 cups spring greens
- 3/4 cup crumbled blue cheese (3 ounces)

To make sauce: In small bowl, stir yogurt, honey and juice. Cover and refrigerate.

To make filling: In large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil. Cook and stir chicken with seasoning in hot oil 4-6 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink in center. Remove from heat. Stir in mango.

Fill pita pockets with greens, chicken mixture and blue cheese. Spoon yogurt sauce on top.

Saucy Pot Roast

- 1 4-lb. pot roast
- 6 tablespoons flour
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- Dash pepper
- 1 1/4 cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- Carrots sliced
- Onions sliced

Brown roast slowly in skillet or over hot coals. Season. Combine flour, sugar, salt, pepper, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, mustard and vinegar for sauce. Put roast on 5-foot lengths of double foil. Spoon half the sauce under the roast. Cover roast with vegetables and remaining sauce. Seal foil. Return to grill or roast in oven for 1 1/2 hours. Serves 6.

Marilyn Meier, Pierce, Nebraska

Easter Dessert

- 1 package white cake mix
- 1 package instant pistachio pudding
- 3/4 cup cooking oil
- 1 cup water
- 3 unbeaten egg whites
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Combine cake and pudding mixes. Add remaining ingredients. Beat well, then pour into a greased and floured 9" X 13" cake pan. Bake according to directions on cake box. Cool completely. While letting the cake cool; soak shredded coconut in a mixture of 3/4 cup water and 3/4 teaspoon green food coloring. Let it dry before putting it on cake. Frost the cake with an 8 oz. container of whipped topping spread evenly. Cut cake into 12 or 15 squares. Top each square with 1 teaspoon or more of colored shredded coconut and top coconut with three small jellybeans. Store cake in refrigerator.

Vlasta Zrust, Clarkson, Nebraska

Cheddar Chowder

- 2 cups boiling water
- 2 cups diced potatoes
- 1/2 cups sliced carrots
- 1/2 cup sliced celery
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 cup margarine
- 1/4 cup flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup cubed cooked ham

Add water to potatoes, carrots, celery, onion, salt and pepper. Cover; simmer 10 minutes. Do not drain. Make white sauce with margarine, flour and milk. Add cheese; stir until melted. Add ham and undrained vegetables. Heat but do not boil. Serves 6-8.

Jan Kozeny, Papillion, Nebraska

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