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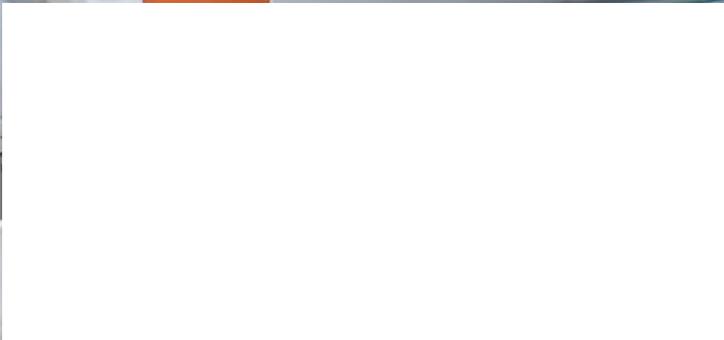
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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CHIPPEWA VALLEY GROWERS



PLATFORM
TILT UP

PLATFORM
ROTATE CCW

ON



NO JOKE: LET'S BUST A FEW ENERGY MYTHS

By Monica Obrycki, President and CEO

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

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April Fool's Day is all about tall tales and tricks, but the energy myths we're tackling this month are no joke. This month, we're going to do the opposite and bust a few common energy myths.

Over the years, many of us have picked up habits we believe are saving energy. They sound logical. Some have been repeated for decades. The problem? A few of them simply aren't true, and believing them can actually cost more in the long run.

Take lighting, for example. There's a long-standing belief that it's cheaper to leave lights on than to turn them off because flipping the switch uses a surge of electricity. In reality, that surge is minimal, especially with today's LED bulbs. Leaving lights on in empty rooms uses far more energy than simply turning them off. If no one is in the room, it's always better to hit the switch.

Another common misconception shows up on chilly days. You walk into a cold house and turn the thermostat up several extra degrees, hoping it will heat faster. Unfortunately, thermostats don't work like a gas pedal. They don't control the speed of heating. They simply tell your system what final temperature to reach. Raising it won't warm your home any faster. It will just make the system run longer, potentially using more energy than necessary.

We also hear from members who close vents in unused rooms, thinking it will redirect air and save money. It seems logical, but heating and cooling systems are designed to operate with balanced airflow. Closing vents can actually make the system work harder and reduce efficiency. Often, simple maintenance and proper insulation



provide better results than closing off vents.

The next common myth is that appliances don't use electricity when they're turned off. Many devices, such as televisions, gaming systems, office equipment, and even phone chargers, continue to draw small amounts of power in standby mode. These "phantom loads" won't dramatically spike your bill overnight, but over time they can add up. Unplugging a device is the only sure way to know it isn't using any energy.

Some myths are more surprising. Many people assume washing dishes by hand is always more efficient than using a dishwasher. In reality, modern dishwashers are designed to be very efficient with both water and energy. If you're running full loads and using the energy-saving setting, your dishwasher may actually use less water than handwashing, especially if the faucet is left running.

Ceiling fans are another area of confusion. Fans don't cool rooms; they cool people. They create a wind-chill

effect that makes you feel cooler, but they don't actually lower the room's temperature. Running a fan in an empty room only adds to energy use without providing any benefit.

And while major upgrades like replacing windows can certainly improve efficiency, they aren't always the first or best place to start. In many homes, sealing air leaks, adding insulation, and maintaining heating and cooling equipment provide a better return on investment. Sometimes the biggest savings come from the simplest improvements.

At Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, our goal isn't to promote gimmicks or quick fixes. It's to help you make informed decisions about how you use energy wisely. Small, practical steps can add up to real savings over time. This April, as you navigate the practical jokes and harmless pranks of April Fool's Day, remember that saving energy doesn't require tricks. It simply requires good information and a few thoughtful habits—and that's no joke.

Chippewa Valley Growers

When most of us are still scraping frost from our windshields and knocking snow from our boots, spring has already arrived inside Chippewa Valley Growers.

In late February, while winter still has a firm grip on the Chippewa Valley, rows of tiny transplants begin filling the benches across 12 greenhouses totaling nearly 54,000 square feet. What starts as trays of seedlings slowly becomes the hanging baskets, vegetable starts, flowering annuals, shrubs, and trees that will soon fill yards, patios, and gardens across the Chippewa Valley.

John and Jessi Kelly have owned Chippewa Valley Growers since 2018, and for them, the growing season is equal parts chemistry, strategy, and heart. Their retail doors open in early April and remain open through October, but everyone in the greenhouse world knows that May is their busiest time of year. Mother's Day weekend alone makes up nearly 16% of their total annual revenue. It's a whirlwind of color, carts, and customers eager to finally dig into the dirt.

Behind that burst of spring energy is months of preparation and deliberate decision-making.

The greenhouse industry has felt the weight of inflation in recent years. Rising costs for soil, pots, fertilizers, plastics, fuel, and wages have squeezed margins in

what is already a seasonal business. Like many small business owners, the Kellys have had to look closely at where they can adapt without compromising what customers have come to expect. One of those avenues is a continual focus on labor and production efficiencies.

One of the most impactful changes has been adjusting their growing schedule. By starting transplants about two weeks later than they once did, they've shortened the stretch of time their greenhouses need to be heated during the coldest part of winter. In February, when overnight temperatures

dip well below freezing, heating large greenhouse spaces requires significant energy. Trimming even a couple of weeks off early season production reduces energy use while still producing strong, healthy plants in time for spring demand. To make up for the difference in lost production time, they have made significant investments in upgraded greenhouse automation and the purchase of LED grow lights, while at the same time having a keen focus on improving transplant line efficiencies so more production is achieved in less time.

Inside the greenhouse, comfort





forced means. Utilizing temperature drops just prior to dawn and for a period of four hours after dawn is a natural plant growth regulator. A large focus is put on plant maintenance. Long before a customer ever sees the plants they have been cut back and had flower buds removed multiple times in an effort to keep that plant forcing energy to its root system rather than canopy. Fertilizers are precisely delivered through their watering systems, providing consistent nutrition while minimizing waste. As John says, “We feed ‘em until they’re out the door.” The goal isn’t simply to sell a plant that looks beautiful the day you bring it home, but to provide one that continues to thrive long after planting season has passed and the scorching sunny days of July and August are upon us.

and consistency are everything for both plants and people alike. Warm air naturally rises, collecting near the ceiling, while cooler air lingers at bench level where plants grow. A few years back Chippewa Valley Growers worked with J&D Manufacturing to install destratification fans. These destratification fans gently circulate that warm air back down, helping reduce heating demand and create a more stable environment. They currently have two greenhouses with these fans and hope to add more in the future.

As the seasons shift, automation takes over many of the adjustments. Ventilation systems are the epicenter of the greenhouse. They open and close greenhouse vents and run horizontal air flow fans, heaters, energy curtains, and LED lighting based on a variety of environmental factors and conditions. Horizontal airflow fans keep air moving to create a more even temperature throughout each greenhouse.

While technology certainly supports their operation, what truly sets Chippewa Valley Growers apart is the intentional way they grow. Instead of pushing plants to size up as quickly as possible, they prioritize strength and resilience. This is done by a combination of natural and

In recent years, Chippewa Valley Growers has also expanded into landscape maintenance services. These services include mulch and rock refreshes or new installations, existing landscaped area maintenance and replacements, custom planters, and even new installations on new

home construction. Basically, anything landscape-related besides hardscapes can be handled. Many customers opt to join an ongoing maintenance program with weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly services.

For many families, a spring visit to the greenhouse has become tradition and a passion — picking out flowers for Mom, choosing vegetable varieties for the garden, or simply walking through rows of color after a long winter. It’s a reminder that warmer days are ahead.

From those first February transplants to the rush of Mother’s Day and the steady rhythm of summer, Chippewa Valley Growers blends hard work, thoughtful energy use, and a genuine commitment to achieving shareworthy customer service. Every hanging basket and garden flat represents months of planning, proven growing practices, hard work by a dedicated and determined staff, and a belief that strong roots, in plants and in community, matter.

As another season begins, Chippewa Valley Growers is once again ready to help local gardens grow, one carefully tended plant at a time.



Lineworker Appreciation Day April 13, 2026

When the lights go out, lineworkers are ready to answer the call, day or night, to safely restore power and keep our communities moving forward. They take pride in powering the places we call home. On Lineworker Appreciation Day and every day, we thank lineworkers for their service and commitment. We would like to extend a special thank you to ECEC lineworkers.

Rick - 41 years
Beau - 26 years
Kris - 12 years
Alex G - 7 years
Josh W - 4 years
Joe - 1 year
Keith - 1 year

Jeff - 40 years
Milt - 18 years
Alex K - 10 years
Jake - 6 years
Alec - 3 years
Josh C - 1 year
Sydni - 1 month



BRIDGE CREEK SOLAR: ADDING VALUE FOR MEMBERS



Bridge Creek Solar, a 2.5-megawatt solar array in Augusta, Wisconsin, was developed in partnership with OneEnergy Renewables. The array went live in fall of 2025. Through a purchased power agreement, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative purchases some of the energy produced at the site and sells it to our wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power Cooperative. The margin created through this agreement directly benefits all cooperative members. This is another example of how ECEC continues exploring innovative ways to bring value to our members and community.

Happy Easter!

**ECEC will be closed on April 3 for
Good Friday.**



Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

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Lobby Hours: 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Monday–Thursday;
7:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. Friday

Non-emergencies: 715-832-1603

Emergencies & outages: Toll FREE 800-927-5090
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Diggers Hotline: 811 or 1-800-242-8511
Call 3 working days before you dig.

ECEC is closed on April 3 for Good Friday