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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

August 2024

VERNON
Electric
COOPERATIVE WESTBY, WISCONSIN
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

2024 FARM TECHNOLOGY DAYS
IS GROWING TO THE TUNE OF SUCCESS

**QUANTUM LEAP:
THE NEXT INTERNET REVOLUTION**

BASELOAD VS. INTERMITTENT POWER

MUST HAVE MUSTARD



ELECTRICITY PROVIDES POWERFUL VALUE

By Trevor Clark, Manager of Communications & Member Relations

If you're like me, some aspects of your life become sort of a daily routine. I get ready for work, help my wife get the kids ready for the day, get in my car, and drive to work. Occasionally, I stop at Kwik Trip and grab a sandwich or something to drink, but most of the time, we have coffee brewed at home. At lunchtime, I typically leave the office for fresh air and grab a quick bite to eat. Once the workday has ended, I head home, play with our kids, and have dinner before preparing them for bed. As the chaos subsides, my wife and I may stream an episode or two of our favorite shows on one of our many streaming platforms before heading to bed.

Many of you who have young children, teenagers, or have had children may be thinking to yourself, that is a mild routine. Well, I did not mention the number of things my kids are involved in that contribute to our routines being modified: daycare, gymnastics, T-ball, swimming lessons, as well as kindergarten starting this fall.

In addition to our kids' activities, two important things remain constant: electricity and internet.

As we all look for ways to save money during our busy lives, and in this age of increasing inflation, I began to think about our spending habits and how much value my spending provides me. Like most, I concluded, there are several non-essentials, subscriptions, and lunches I could easily do without, such as a breakfast sandwich and drink for \$6, lunch for \$10, and Hulu streaming for \$18 each month. I estimate this costs me about \$150 per month because I do not get breakfast and lunch every day. This got me thinking—is this the best value for my money?

We do have things that bring my family joy, especially my kids' items like Disney Plus, gymnastics, T-ball, and swimming lessons. Even as we start crunching the numbers, we always look for ways to cut back and save money. My wife and I have always agreed that we will try our best to give our kids as many opportunities as we can, so rarely do we consider stopping activities they participate in. In addition to our kids' activities, two important things remain constant: electricity and internet.

My electric bill closely follows the average residential



Trevor Clark with his son, Maverick.

bill for typical homes. The average daily cost of electricity is about \$4.57, and the average monthly electric bill is \$146. If I were to make breakfast every morning, pack my lunch, and cancel one of our streaming services, I could cover the cost for an average monthly electric bill. Electricity provides benefits that we often take for granted. It goes well beyond short-term satisfaction by allowing us to charge devices, have cold food and hot water, all in a comfortable indoor climate. Besides the privilege it affords, electricity has also remained relatively cost-stable amidst rising inflation.

Like many of you, I review my electric bill every month and sometimes am caught off guard by the amount. Before panic sets in, I head over to our online account in SmartHub and review my usage. This has been a great tool as I can see the peaks and valleys of when energy is used in our home through the Energy Explorer feature. On days when our usage is high, I can narrow it down to a specific time, and it usually sparks an “ah ha” moment.

As a member-owned cooperative, Vernon Electric

Cooperative does everything in its power to ensure your costs stay reasonable and that electricity remains a great value for our members. It's not always easy, as several factors beyond inflation impact the price of electricity — some within our control but most beyond it. For the expenses that we can control, I am happy to report that when benchmarked against all electric cooperatives in the nation, we are in the top quartile for the lowest controllable expenses.

The things outside of our control include the cost of electricity, which can fluctuate due to supply and demand, infrastructure investment, maintenance and operational expenses. Weather patterns also contribute to the uncontrollable expenses, which

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affect both demand and generation capabilities, with extreme conditions leading to heightened energy use or disruptions. Government policies, such as subsidies for renewable energy or taxes and emissions regulations, shape electricity costs, too. Your electric co-op considers all these aspects when adjusting rates, and because we're a cooperative, we consider the impact of those costs on our members.

As our community continues to rely on electricity for nearly everything in our homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses, Vernon Electric Cooperative needs it to be reliable and affordable. You can be assured we always put you top of mind and work each day to ensure electricity remains the best value for your money.



Make your life easier with SmartHub, an online tool to help you manage your account 24/7.

- Pay your VEC bill and view billing history
- Report and view outages
- View and manage your electric usage
- Find ways to lower your energy bill

Download the FREE mobile app in the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

Where Do You Find Value?

Did you know the average daily cost of electricity is \$4.57, or about \$140 per month?

Electricity fuels our daily life essentials, from heating/cooling equipment to entertainment devices and appliances. Think of how vital power is compared to other everyday purchases. **That's real value.**



Morning To-Go Latte



Fast-Food Combo Lunch



All-Day Power

Sources: Energy Information Administration, MoneyGeek and CNET



FROM

Vine TO Wine



By Leah Call

As the warm days of August progress into fall, John Pedretti walks through his 22-year-old vineyard checking the grapes for color, fullness, levels of sugar, PH and acid, and, of course, taste. Soon these little fruits will be ready to fulfill their destiny in one of 16 different wines produced at Vernon Vineyards Winery.

"I'm almost 99% estate wine. I get just a very small portion of grapes from my cousin, otherwise everything is grown right here," noted Pedretti.

Harvesting at the optimal time ensures the highest-quality taste, which is always a goal for Pedretti. Once the grapes reach peak ripeness, it's game on. "When they are ready, you only have a small window of about a week or so to pick them," noted Pedretti.

Because of the time-sensitive nature of the harvest, Pedretti uses a mechanical picker to harvest most of the 15 acres of grapes he grows, though some vines need to be hand-picked.

The efficiency of machine-picking versus hand-picking is significant. "If I was going to pick ten tons of grapes by hand, it would take probably three days. A machine will do it in about four hours," explained Pedretti, who hopes to eventually machine-harvest 100% of his grapes.

Working the Vineyard

Getting the grapes to harvest is the culmination of a year-long process. Pedretti compares the labor-intensive task of tending grapes to growing tobacco—something familiar to many in Vernon County. "But you're standing up for most of it," he quipped.

The vineyard requires vigilant weed management throughout the growing season. "I'm really tough on the weeds, because the weeds will hold moisture that allows fungus, and that will damage your crop," explained Pedretti.

Airflow is the goal. Pedretti and three or four seasonal helpers mow and trim weeds and suckers at the base of the plants. They also manage the canopy to maximize sunlight, production, and fruit quality.

Battling fungus is second to battling pests. "You have to be on the lookout for the Japanese beetles," said Pedretti. "When they come out, they can be devastating to your canopy and production."





Vernon Vineyards' tasting room has seating inside and outside on the patio. It's open Wednesday through Sunday.

Even after the harvest the work doesn't stop. Once the grapes are picked, Pedretti puts a product on the vines to return sugars to the roots so the plants can survive the Wisconsin winter. Then, following a couple hard freezes, it's time to start pruning the entire vineyard, which takes about three months and is done completely by hand.

Growing a Business

Pedretti planted his first grape vines in 2002 on 40 acres between Westby and Viroqua. At that time Vernon Vineyards was a business launched by Loren Cade and Bob Starks. In 2012, Pedretti purchased the Vernon Vineyards name from Cade and Starks. Then in 2015, he purchased 35 acres next to his property from his father and built the tasting room, which overlooks the Vineyard.

Pedretti's Party Barn also sits on the 75-acre property. The Party Barn has become a popular venue for weddings, parties, and corporate events, with plenty of wine close by for celebrating.

Fruits of Labor

Vernon Vineyards Winery produces 15,000 to 20,000 bottles of wine annually. Pedretti also sells grapes and juice to other wineries. "My vineyard is capable of making about 65,000 bottles of wine," he said.

The grapes grown at Vernon Vineyards are University of Minnesota cold-climate grapes that can stand temperatures as low as -50 degrees. "Because they are so cold hardy, the grapes have more acid, which makes it harder to make dryer wines," explained Pedretti. "Though I don't have a lot of dry or a lot of super sweet wines, I do the whole spectrum, from dry to dessert wine."

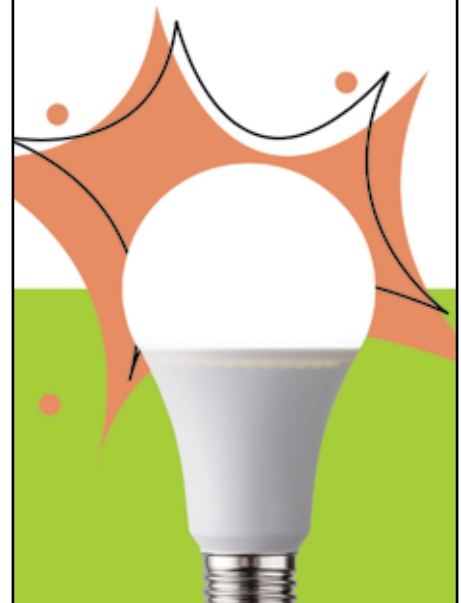
Vernon Vineyards wine is available for purchase on-site or at 53 stores in the region. The tasting room is open Wednesday through Sunday with seating inside or on the patio, allowing guests to enjoy the vineyard-to-glass experience just steps from the vines.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Placing heat sources, such as lamps, computers or TVs, near your thermostat can result in false temperature readings, increased energy use, and inconsistent cooling/heating. Make sure your thermostat is installed in an area clear of obstructions, electronic devices, direct sunlight, and drafts.

Ensuring your thermostat is free from these types of interferences optimizes energy efficiency, improves indoor comfort, and reduces wear and tear on your cooling/heating system.

Source: energy.gov



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