

# Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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## Guest Column



# We're glad for our normal summer routine

By Doug Roles, Vice President of Member Services

AT THE time of this writing, in early June, we're hopeful that the height of the COVID-19 pandemic has passed. As things slowly inch back toward normal, it's comforting to focus on some of the things that haven't changed. After the challenges of operating during the coronavirus restrictions, there's something to be said for routine tasks and programs not impacted by the pandemic.

For starters, we are again asking consumers to do the "Electric Shift" this summer. As usual, to cut down on consumption at times when the price of electricity is the highest, consider operating washers, dryers, dishwashers, and stoves in the early morning or evening. You can also set air conditioners at 78 degrees or use fans instead. As we have said before, these steps help stabilize future wholesale power costs for your co-op.

With the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions, we are again actively making appointments with interested members for installation of demand response units (DRUs). In an approach similar to shifting electric use, the demand response program utilizes water heater switches to help reduce load during periods of peak demand by temporarily shutting off power. Program participants are not inconvenienced because water heaters are well-insulated and maintain water temperature. If the program is a good fit for you, you'll receive a \$100 bill credit for participating.

Mid-summer also means that our

annual pole inspection is underway. Valley REC is again contracting with Osмосе Utilities Services. Identifying deteriorating poles can save the co-op money and spare consumers the inconvenience of an outage. Extending the useful lives of utility poles through inspection and treatment is cost-effective for the co-op, since the price of a pole can range from \$130 to more than \$260. The inspection crews are nice folks, very sociable, but they can certainly carry out their work and keep a social distance.

Another constant is the need for motorists to be aware of our work zones and those of road crews and other utilities. Sure signs of summer in Pennsylvania are orange traffic cones and reduced-speed signs. Cars or trucks that speed through a work zone not only endanger workers on the ground, but driving too fast, not moving over, or driving distracted can also put an elevated lineworker in danger by causing the bucket to move or sway. Lineworkers already have enough to contend with by working high up on power lines while out in the elements. Please, do your part to keep them safe.


We will continue to feel the ripple effect of the coronavirus for the foreseeable future. There are still unknowns about how we will truly get back to normal. One thing we can tell you with certainty is that your electric cooperative remains committed to providing safe, affordable, and reliable power to our members' homes, farms, and businesses. 



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

# Crossing over

## Local dairy operation sees beef market as family farm's future

By Doug Roles  
Vice President of Member Services

TWO LOCAL dairy farmers are joining a trend and beefing up their milking operation. Brothers Matt and Brad Barnett, who operate Sugar Run Dairy Farm in Todd Township, Huntingdon County, are not adding more Holsteins to the herd. Instead, they're crossbreeding some of their cows to diversify into the beef market.

Dairy farmers put in long hours — supplying our milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream — in the face of continuing uncertainty in their industry. The various stressors have an increasing number of dairymen exploring their options.

"We're looking for something to diversify, using the facilities we already

have," Matt says. "We're going to whittle down the dairy herd a little. We have to, because of our facilities and space."

Matt and Brad are in the midst of a five-year plan to take over the dairy operation from their parents, Harry and Robin Barnett, who started Sugar Run Dairy Farm in 1981. Harry grew up on a dairy farm near the 120 acres of the Sugar Run farm.

Sugar Run uses a total of 500 acres, including rented ground. The Barnetts raise crops to provide most of their own cattle feed and have one full-time employee and four part-time employees. Like other dairy operations, they've tried to keep pace in a rapidly-changing industry rife with economic challenges.

"Originally, this started out as a 30-cow dairy," Matt says, adding that 150

cows now go through their milking parlor twice daily. "The trend is to get bigger."

But rather than continue to grow the dairy herd, Matt and Brad are drawn to beef because they want a less labor-intensive income stream. There will still be a lot of work to be done, but beef cattle don't require the scheduling that milk cows do. And, Matt says, it's easier to train employees to take care of beef cattle.

"We're looking at raising cross-breeds, Holstein with Angus," Matt explained. "We're hoping to be able to find a local, niche market."

In the near term, Matt and Brad will be adding to their workload. Their goal is to reach a point where they are sending 20 to 40 beef animals to market

each month. They're also considering opening a butcher shop on-site. Their first crossbred calf was born at the end of March.

The crossbreeds will have a finish weight of 1,200 to 1,400 pounds. The Barnetts are working with Penn State Extension advisers to develop crossbred animals with desirable beef traits.

The crossbreeding program does not entail the costs that would be associated with purchasing a beef herd.

Graduates of Tussey Mountain High School, Matt earned a marketing degree at Saint Francis University in 2001, and Brad earned a degree in agribusiness from Penn State in 2007. Both returned to Sugar Run to carry on the farming tradition.

Sugar Run is one of 1,700 farms that produce milk for the Land O' Lakes dairy cooperative. Production and pricing is an ongoing balancing act in the dairy industry. An oversupply can cause co-ops to purchase milk from member farms on a quota system, accepting so much at a premium price while gallons above that amount are purchased at a base price. At the height of the COVID-19 shutdown, some producers were just fortunate to sell milk as restaurants and schools shut down and demand decreased. Whether the milk price is rising or falling, dairy cows have to be milked, and costs for feed, seed, and fuel have to be met.

"For a typical dairy farm, it takes \$19 a hundredweight to break even," Matt says of the price a farmer receives for 100 pounds of raw milk. "May's milk price was \$12, and the price for June [at the time of this writing in late May] is forecasted to be \$17."

"This year was predicted to be a good year," Matt reported. "That was before the COVID-19 pandemic."

Matt, who serves as president of the Huntingdon County Farm Bureau and is on the Todd Township Board of Su-

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Dairy farmer Matt Barnett checks his Holstein/Angus-cross calves at Sugar Run Dairy Farm.

**AT RIGHT:** Matt (left) and Brad Barnett pause for a photo with some of the farm's 150 dairy cows.

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES



**SCENIC:** Sugar Run Dairy Farm is located in Todd Township, Huntingdon County. Terrace Mountain is shown in the background.

pervisors, says the industry used to be more predictable. He says through the 1980s and 1990s it seemed there was a six-year pattern between the highs and lows. The global market can add volatility to milk pricing. For example, Matt notes, in 2014, China opened up and took in lots of milk. The hundred-weight price shot up to \$24. The next year, China closed its doors.

"We're looking at the future," Matt explains. "We wanted a sustainable future for the farm, and we just weren't sure dairy was going to do that. We're hoping, eventually, to work our way out of dairy and have the beef as a retirement plan."

"We want to get back some of our time," Brad agrees, adding that a 70-hour work week is about the normal

on the farm. "I think it will be good for us, particularly on our personal lives."

Matt does more work with feeding and nutrition, while Brad focuses on herd management. They've been considering the move to beef for about two years. Matt is married with three children ranging in age from 3 to 19, while Brad is married with a 6-year-old and 2-year-old twins. They're hopeful that somewhere in that mix is another generation of farmers.

The question is whether or not dairy will still be part of the Barnetts' operation. Matt predicts more of the same for dairy farming.

"You'll see bigger dairy farms and the small ones selling out to the larger ones," Matt says. "You're already seeing it." 🌞

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES



# Meet your employees

FEATURED in this column is a recent addition to the Valley REC team, Tyler Lingafelt. Hired in February, Lingafelt works as a journeyman lineman in Valley's Huntingdon District.

Lingafelt is a 2010 graduate of Altoona Area High School. After high school, he spent a year at University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown pursuing a degree in history. While working for two summers with Altoona Water Authority, Lingafelt decided he preferred hands-on work in an outdoor setting. He had some interest in electricity from an electrical theory class he had taken in high school. And his half-brother, Matt Fagan — now a journeyman lineman in Valley's Martinsburg District — had taken him to a climbing school pole yard in Ebensburg, to teach him climbing basics.

Lingafelt started linework by applying to an apprenticeship program with the International Brotherhood of Electrical



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

ON DUTY: Tyler Lingafelt joined the Valley REC team in February. He works as a journeyman lineman in our Huntingdon district.

Workers Local 1319, in Kingston, and then worked for several contractors doing line construction work.

He worked as an apprentice for four and one-half years and as a journeyman for three and one-half years, traveling to New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts. He also assisted with hurricane-related work in Florida.

"It was cool; you traveled a lot, and you got to meet a lot of people," Lingafelt says. "But, to be honest, I got tired of traveling. I was ready to come home."

Lingafelt bought a home in Martinsburg, Blair County, nearly a year ago. He is glad to be off the road and spending more time working around the house. He says he enjoys working for the co-op because it's a family environment and his coworkers are more than willing to answer the many questions from a new employee.

Lingafelt says being a lineworker for an electrical co-op entails a mix of duties, everything from line construction and outage restoration work to service work and replacing area lights. And he likes working in the scenic greater Huntingdon area.

"It's nice because not every day is the same," he says. "All the guys are great."

When he's not working, he spends time with his girlfriend and niece and nephew. He also enjoys golfing, hunting ducks and pheasants, and following college basketball and football.

The Valley REC family is glad to have Tyler on board. He's one of the people you can count on. ☀️

## YOU CAN HELP REDUCE FUTURE POWER COSTS.

Our future electric rates are partially based on how much power you use on hot, humid weekdays between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. this summer. When you hear an announcement from your local electric cooperative about doing the "Electric Shift," try these simple steps:

### CLIMATE CONTROL



- Set air conditioners at 78 degrees or use fans instead.
- Close curtains and blinds to keep things cooler in your home.

### USE OF APPLIANCES



- Operate washers, dryers, dishwashers, stoves and other major appliances in early morning or evening.
- Minimize the number of times you open your refrigerator and freezer.
- Cook with an outdoor grill or a microwave oven.

### FLIP THE SWITCH AND UNPLUG



- Turn off any non-essential lights.
- Convert to LED light bulbs.
- Unplug devices from their respective outlets when not in use.

### OUTDOOR TIPS



- Run pool pumps at night.
- Plant plants on the south and west sides of your house - it can provide much needed shade during the hottest hours of the day.
- Ditch the dryer and use a clothesline.