

Along these LINES

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026



Beyond the Workday

In August, Jeff Lea celebrates 18 years with DEMCO. Those years are marked by humility, consistency and a genuine commitment to serving others **Page 18**

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Powering Louisiana Together

Meet ALEC's interim CEO

By Aaron Graham, Interim CEO

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Aaron Graham, and I am honored to serve as the interim CEO of the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives. I have spent most of my career in the cooperative system, beginning with Red Simpson, a utility contractor at DEMCO. Shortly after, I joined DEMCO and benefited from its outstanding educational program, one of the many ways electric cooperatives invest in their employees and strengthen the communities they serve.

With the support of that program, I earned a degree in occupational and environmental safety from Southeastern Louisiana University and joined ALEC in 2005. I was fortunate to learn from two exceptional mentors, Mike Bergeaux and Randy Pierce, who instilled in me the values and principles that define the electric cooperative model. Those values continue to guide me, and I am proud to share them with our members.

ALEC serves as the statewide trade organization for Louisiana's electric cooperatives, which include Beauregard Electric, Claiborne Electric, DEMCO, Jeff Davis Electric, Panola Harrison Electric, South Louisiana Electric and

Washington-St. Tammany Electric. These cooperatives are not-for-profit, member-owned organizations led by boards of directors elected by you, our members. That structure ensures you have a voice in how your cooperative operates.

Working at a co-op truly feels like working with family. We look out for each other, support one another and advocate for the members we serve. Cooperatives give back in meaningful ways through safety training at schools, fire stations and police departments; through scholarships; and through programs such as Youth Tour, which invests in the next generation of leaders.

These electric cooperatives are staffed by your neighbors—people who live, work, worship and raise their families alongside you—to provide safe, reliable and affordable power. Your board members are also community members, often with deep roots spanning generations.

Because cooperatives focus on service over profit, any revenue beyond operating expenses is reinvested directly into the cooperatives and the communities they serve. This approach helps strengthen local infrastructure, support youth programs and keep rates as affordable as possible.



Though cooperatives are typically smaller than investor-owned utilities, they face the same challenges. Today, one of the greatest concerns is electric capacity. As demand grows, ensuring we have enough power to meet members' needs is critical.

Despite these challenges, cooperatives continue to fuel economic growth and strengthen local infrastructure. They invest in system improvements, resilience measures, and storm hardening to better withstand severe weather and environmental impacts.

The opportunities and benefits available to co-op members are truly unique. ALEC's motto is, "One family, one voice, powering Louisiana." But the cooperative system is even more than that. It is a network of people built by the community and for the community. Like any family, its strength lies in unity, support and shared purpose.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as interim CEO and look forward to continuing the meaningful work of providing opportunity, savings and support to co-op members across Louisiana—benefits only electric cooperatives can offer. ■

RIGHT: Austin Hudspeith, center, is presented with a plaque recognizing 26 years of service to DEMCO.

BELOW The Louisiana Superintendents and Foremen's Association presented outgoing President Rickey Cummings, second from left, with a plaque in recognition of his leadership. Pictured from left are Jonathan Nunez, Jeff Davis Electric Cooperative; Rickey Cummings; Mike Bergeaux, Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives; and Aaron Graham, ALEC.




Louisiana Superintendents and Foremen's Association Hosts Annual Banquet

The Louisiana Superintendents and Foremen's Association hosted its annual banquet in December. The group honored retirees and outgoing President Rickey Cummings, of DEMCO, and welcomed incoming President Jonathan Nunez of Jeff Davis Electric Cooperative.

Retirees not pictured:

- ▶ **Scott Deshotel, 23 years at Beauregard Electric Cooperative**
- ▶ **Mikael Johnson, 32 years at BECi**
- ▶ **Jeff Lilleton, 20 years at BECi**
- ▶ **Chad Papillion, 33 years at BECi**



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Volume 41, Issue 1

Mission

To enhance the quality of life for our members, employees, and communities by safely providing reliable and competitively priced energy services.

Along These Lines (USPS 4089) is published bimonthly by the Association of Louisiana Electric Co-ops Inc., 10725 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70816, in partnership with Pioneer Utility Resources.

Annual Subscriptions: Members \$2.57.
Nonmembers \$5.

Postmaster: Send form 3579 to 10725 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70816.

Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821 and additional mailing offices.

DEMCO is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



As we celebrate the beginning of a new year, we also commemorate 88 years of service. From our humble beginnings of 450 meters in 1938 to more than 120,000 meters today, DEMCO's growth is a testament to the cooperative spirit that built this organization and continues to sustain it.

We were built strong, and to stay strong, we must continue making responsible decisions that ensure DEMCO's long-term stability. Every aspect of our work—from wholesale power acquisition to system maintenance and growth—is guided by prudence and foresight.

As a not-for-profit cooperative, DEMCO is driven by service—not profit—and every decision we make reflects that commitment. Our rates are designed to recover operating and capital costs, while minimizing storm recovery expenses and managing debt responsibly.

Our income and expenses are carefully allocated to operate, maintain, and grow a system that spans seven parishes and includes more than 9,000 miles of line, 35 substations, three switching stations, two mobile substations and 10 metering points. Every dollar collected is reinvested into the system, the people and the communities we serve.

Through the years, sound decision-making has empowered DEMCO to grow stronger and more resilient.

That strength is reinforced by sound governance and leadership from our locally elected board of directors. Thirteen member-owners, trained through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Gold Credential program, provide direction and oversight that ensure DEMCO's integrity, transparency, and commitment to the communities we serve. Their leadership, combined with the work of every DEMCO employee, helps ensure our rates remain fair, stable and aligned with the true cost of serving our members.

As I mentioned in November's message, the Louisiana Public Service Commission approved updates to DEMCO's base rates, tariffs and overall rate design last fall. Those changes are reflected on your January bill. While the fixed portion of the bill has increased slightly, other variable charges have decreased. Together, these updates provide better alignment with the true cost of providing electric service. They also strengthen DEMCO's ability to plan for the future, maintain reliability and keep power affordable for our members.

Adjusting rate structures from time to time is part of the responsibility of managing a system of this size and complexity. These decisions, though sometimes difficult, are essential to ensuring DEMCO remains strong, resilient and positioned to serve our members for generations to come.

As we move into 2026, we remain deeply grateful for the cooperative you've entrusted to our care. We take that trust seriously and continue to pledge our full attention and service to DEMCO's enduring legacy—one built on strength, accountability, and a shared commitment to powering life and community for decades to come.

Danny Berthelot

President, DEMCO Board of Directors

A new year brings new opportunities, and at DEMCO, strong leadership sets the tone.

Board President Danny Berthelot, recently named 2025 Co-op Leader of the Year, leads with the cooperative values of safety, integrity, trust, innovation, member focus and excellence. For him, leadership is rooted in service to the people who rely on DEMCO every day.

As the cooperative's principal executive officer, Danny represents members across Livingston Parish and beyond. His service on the DEMCO Energy Services board and the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives reflects his commitment to strengthening Louisiana's energy future and advocating for reliable, affordable service. He understands the needs of rural communities, local businesses and families who count on dependable power.

Whether guiding planning efforts or supporting community initiatives, Danny brings a steady vision rooted in relationships and responsibility. Under his leadership, DEMCO remains focused on reliability, community investment and preparing for the needs of tomorrow's members—all while staying true to its cooperative roots.

A lifelong resident of Livingston Parish, Danny is a business owner whose company raises, markets, and sells alligator products nationwide and internationally. He has served on the Louisiana Rancher and Farmers Association board and currently resides in the Whitehall community.

Danny is a graduate of Maurepas High School and attended Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. ■



Favorite Quote

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

—THOMAS EDISON

Get to Know Board President Danny Berthelot

Favorite Local Spot

Lake Maurepas for fishing, boating and hunting. I've enjoyed those pastimes since age 12, when my dad first took me.

Fun Fact

In my senior year (of high school), I played guard for the Maurepas Wolves and once took a charge from Karl Malone—who later became an NBA Hall of Famer with the Utah Jazz.

Hidden Talent

After high school, I sang at weddings, graduations and in a band.

Current Favorites

- Book: “Huey Long” by T. Harry Williams
- TV Show: “Yellowstone”
- Podcast: DEMCO’s “Co-op Conversations”—great topics and insights.



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DEMCO BOARD ELECTION
DIXIE ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2026 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 10 a.m.

LOCATION OF MEETING

DEMCO Headquarters Facility
16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, LA 70739
(Elections in Districts 4, 5, 8 and 10)

**February 9, 2026 –
March 6, 2026**

Publish the Calendar of Events in the official journal of each parish, including the date, time, and place of the meeting of the Nominating Committee.

**March 10, 2026 –
March 12, 2026**

Pre-qualification period. Members interested in seeking a position on the board of directors are required pursuant to DEMCO bylaws to appear in person between these dates to determine eligibility as prescribed in the corporation's bylaws. Candidates not pre-qualified will not be eligible to seek a position on the board of directors.

March 19, 2026

DEMCO Governance Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. on this date, if needed, to determine eligibility of director candidates who have pre-qualified. Only candidates who have pre-qualified will be considered.

March 19, 2026

DEMCO Board Meeting at 5 p.m. at DEMCO Headquarters. The Committee on Nominations will be appointed at this meeting.

March 19, 2026

The Nominating Committee meeting begins at 5:05 p.m. at DEMCO Headquarters, 16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, LA, 70739, with results of the meeting to be posted March 20, 2026.

March 20, 2026

This is the Record Date for the 2026 Annual Membership Meeting. A final list of those members eligible to vote in DEMCO's 2026 Annual Membership Meeting will be prepared.

March 23, 2026

Beginning on this date, pre-qualified director candidates may obtain a petition to run for a seat on the board of directors. DEMCO bylaws require 50 valid signatures for the petition to be validated.

April 6, 2026

Petitions must be returned to DEMCO headquarters office by 4:30 p.m. and received by the CEO and General Manager's office.

April 16, 2026

The Governance Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. on this date, if needed, to validate each petition and post the results as required by the corporation's bylaws on this date.

**April 20, 2026 –
April 24, 2026**

The Official Notice of the 2026 Annual Meeting will be mailed to all members of the cooperative during this time.

April 20, 2026

Ballots for the 2026 Annual Meeting will be mailed to members of the cooperative on this date. Members should receive their ballots by Saturday, April 25, 2026 —VOTE and mail your ballot immediately.

May 1, 2026

The deadline for receiving ballots for the 2026 Annual Membership Meeting is 4:30 p.m. on this date —DO NOT DELAY—VOTE.

May 4, 2026 – May 5, 2026

Ballots will be counted during this period by the certified public accountants selected by DEMCO to conduct the annual meeting. Candidates will be advised as to the time and place that the ballots will be counted.

May 9, 2026

Annual meeting and election results announced at 10 a.m. at 16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, LA 70739.

MORE POWER FOR YOUR FUTURE



Member-students can apply for one-year scholarships of \$1,250 for each of two consecutive semesters awarded in a random drawing at the DEMCO annual membership meeting.

Learn more at DEMCO.org/Scholarships.




2026 DEMCO Essay Contest

CALLING ALL 11th GRADE STUDENTS!

High school juniors can enter the 2026 DEMCO Essay Contest. Winners will receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C.!

ENTRIES DUE JAN. 20, 2026

For eligibility and to apply, visit
DEMCO.org/Community/Essay-Contest.



A hunter walks through the woods looking for woodcock, an exciting, erratic flyer with a long bill.

Challenging

Swift little birds
can embarrass
even the
best shots

FOWL

ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY MONO

Story and photos by John N. Felsher

Walking as quietly as possible along a small creek flowing through a hardwood bottom surrounded by a Louisiana pine forest just awakening to a new dawn, I paused occasionally to scan the trees for squirrels.

After looking and listening for several minutes and hearing nothing except the twitter of distant birds, I began to move forward one step at a time to continue my quest for late-season bushytails. Then, I stepped into a grass clump growing next to a thicket.

Suddenly, a brown object exploded at my feet and leapt for my throat, screeching like a banshee on fire. In the dim light, I instinctively jumped back, not knowing whether to drop to the ground, hide, run, climb a tree or shoot the thing in self-defense.

After putting my heart back in its proper place, I realized the

shrieking brown beast about the size of a baseball didn't really leap for my throat. It did jump straight up, peaking off at eye level and zipping through the trees like a miniature radar-guided smart missile on afterburners. After my shaky nerves sufficiently calmed, I spent the rest of the morning trying to repeat the experience.

Two commonly overlooked long-billed birds can provide incredibly exciting wing-shooting action with little competition. Both birds explode from cover, fly swiftly and erratically. Both regularly embarrass even the best wing shots.

Woodcock

The Louisiana woodcock season started Dec. 18 and runs through Jan. 31, with a daily limit of three. Some years, Louisiana hosts up to 70% of the wintering woodcock population in the central United States, but few people intentionally pursue these birds.

Hunters pursuing quail, squirrels, rabbits or other game shoot an occasional woodcock.

Woodcock prefer the thickest cover they can find and often hold tight without flushing until the last second. Their rich chestnut coloration blends in well with brown leaves and other ground debris. They typically remain motionless, almost invisible in their camouflage, until someone practically steps on them. Then, they explode in the person's face.

"When woodcock flush, they are incredibly hard to hit," says Mitchell Marks, a woodcock hunter. "They're extremely agile in the woods. They must get through that thick understory in the habitat they like, so they're a tough target to shoot. They are difficult to hit in a place with a lot of small trees in the way when trying to swing a shotgun and shoot. It's definitely a tough bird to hunt."

Woodcock can eat their weight in earthworms every day. They feed every eight hours around the clock. At first or last light, hunters might catch them flying from the fields to forests or back.

Any place with soft, damp soil where the birds can use their long dexterous bills to probe for earthworms and dense underbrush that gives them good cover could hold woodcock. When scouting for woodcock, look for probe holes where they thrust their bills into the dirt and white splashings, as if someone rubbed chalk on the ground. Splashings and probe holes indicate woodcock visited the area, but these chestnut brown ghosts of fields and forest habitually disappear and reappear overnight.

The best hunting naturally occurs right before or after a severe cold front pushes more birds south. When woodcock find good habitat, they commonly congregate in great numbers and frequently return to the same places each year if nothing changes.

Any public properties with bottomland hardwoods could provide good woodcock action. Some of the best hunting in the nation occurs in the northern end of the Atchafalaya Basin, especially Sherburne Wildlife Management Area and adjacent federal lands.

Snipe

Snipe season runs in two splits. The late split runs Dec. 20 through Feb. 28, with a limit of eight per day.

Because of a legendary practical joke, many people don't believe such a bird as a snipe even exists. A snipe hunt of legend occurs when someone wants to play a trick on a rather dim-witted, gullible and usually inebriated acquaintance.

A group convinces the neophyte hunter to go to some remote location at night, hold a sack and make strange noises while the jokesters promise to beat the bushes to flush the snipe. Then, the victim can catch the snipe in the sack. In reality, the pranksters get in their vehicles and leave the poor victim stranded in the dark, literally holding the bag.

Like woodcock, snipe can provide challenging wing shooting. In fact, the word sniper, describing a military marksman, originated with British soldiers hunting snipe. With the guns available before the 20th century, only the best shots could reliably hit these unpredictable fliers, so they earned the title snipers.

Snipe resemble woodcock, but with more grayish-brown plumage, black barring and lighter flecks more suitable to hiding in grass. Like woodcock, snipe use their long bills with sensitive tips to grab aquatic insects, worms, grubs, snails, small crustaceans or other invertebrates.

Unlike their chestnut-colored cousins, snipe prefer open country, such as marshes, rice fields, wet pastures, river or lake shorelines or other soggy places. While woodcock like damp dirt, snipe thrive in shallow water or wet mudflats.

More snipe probably fall to duck hunters as bonus game than people actually targeting the erratic birds. Waterfowlers might fire at snipe flying over their blinds or walk the marshes and rice fields after the duck flights end for more wing-shooting action. After duck season ends, Louisiana hunters enjoy their best opportunities to bag snipe. Even on heavily pressured public lands, they might find little to no competition in February.

To hunt snipe, sportsmen don't need to arrive before dawn or set out hundreds of decoys. Just load as much ammunition in pockets and start walking the marshes or fields. In groups, spread out at safe intervals. Like woodcock, snipe normally wait until someone almost steps on them before flushing. Then, they seldom fly far. Hunters who mark landing spots could possibly jump them again several times. ■

Similar to woodcock, snipe like soggy marshes and other wet grasslands.



The Future of FARMING

Hydroponics and aquaponics combine agriculture with technology

By Trish Milburn

Extreme weather. Soil degradation. High operation costs. Pests and disease. All of these challenges are familiar to American farmers and, by extension, consumers. Add in obstacles like food deserts—geographical areas, both rural and urban, where nearly 19 million Americans have limited access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture—and it becomes clear that new ways of producing and distributing food are increasingly necessary.

Hydroponics and its cousin aquaponics are beginning to reshape how food is grown across Louisiana, from backyard greenhouses to commercial farms. By replacing soil with nutrient-rich water, these systems allow growers to produce leafy greens, herbs and other produce with remarkable efficiency, often using less space and fewer resources than traditional agriculture. As interest accelerates amid

concerns over sustainability, climate resilience and year-round food access, independent growers are using these soilless methods to help feed the state's present and future.

Hydro...what?

Hydroponics is a method of growing plants without soil, instead using water and a nutrient-rich solution. There are no pesticides or herbicides. Its benefits are impressive—faster plant growth, higher yield, more efficient water use and less chance of contamination.

Another huge plus is year-round growing because it can be, and often is, done indoors in greenhouses, warehouses or other conditioned spaces. This means food can be grown in extreme climates, where the soil is poor or even in the middle of cities.



Business partners James McCready, Marla Martin, Amie Janes and Tony Janes stand amid rows of growing lettuce.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF H2GREAUx



ABOVE: H2Greaux's expects its number of greenhouses to double from six to 12.

ABOVE LEFT: James checks the progress of lettuce plants in one of the greenhouses.

Hydroponic growing can be combined with aquaculture, or raising fish, in a method of food production called aquaponics. In this symbiotic relationship, fish excretions provide nutrients for the plants, which filter the water for the fish.

"They create opportunities beyond conventional farmland," says Mark A. Wilson, associate extension agent, agricultural and natural resources (horticulture) for Bossier, Caddo and Red River parishes. "They also allow for precise control over nutrients and water use, making them appealing for sustainability-minded consumers. While still a niche in Louisiana, these methods showcase innovation in agriculture and could become an important complement to traditional farming as technology and market demand evolve."

"Hydroponics is very efficient," says James McCready of H2Greux Farms in Monroe. "The plant only takes what it needs. There's very little waste and no soil disruption."

H2Greux began small, as many businesses do. In 2019, nurse Amie Janes, her row-crop farmer husband, Tony, and fellow nurse Marla Martin kicked things off with one small greenhouse of lettuce in Marla's front yard. Amie was inspired by the dramatic improvement in her sister's health after she completely changed her diet after being diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder and falling gravely ill at 29 years old. When Amie's sister switched to an all-organic, all-natural diet, her health improved so much that

she no longer had to take medication. This experience with her sister, combined with how she and Marla had seen diet affect the health of patients, led to Amie's desire to grow organic food.

After the pandemic ended the travel James did for his sales job, he was looking for something to do. When he learned what Amie was planning, he immediately expressed his interest in being part of the operation and became the fourth business partner.

"Farming is in my blood," James says. "There are so many farmers in my family. Plants and nature intrigue me."

As nursing administrators during the pandemic, Amie and Marla had no time to work in the greenhouse. But with James on board, they got a new crop in April 2021—the first of many to come.

H2Greux fits its name in more ways than one. The business has grown at a remarkable rate. From that first crop of 300 to 350 heads of lettuce in the front-yard greenhouse, the hydroponic operation has grown to six large greenhouses—four in full production—on a designated property. The operation produces about 6,000 heads of lettuce a week, with a set rotation schedule among the greenhouses.

H2Greux lettuce is found in markets, retail grocers and restaurants. The company also provides lettuce to Louisiana State University Athletics and food banks. Its workforce has increased from the original four business partners to include five additional employees.





AgriAquaculture Center of Excellence Director of Operations Thomas Pat Skidd conducts a tour of the catfish warehouse. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOUISIANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

The farm production is set to grow even more. James says the two greenhouses that didn't have crops in early November were expected to be up and running by the end of 2025, and there are plans to add six more beginning in 2026. H2Greux recently bought four refrigerated trailers for transporting its lettuce to customers, allowing the company to expand its market penetration.

"We'll be able to grow an estimated 70,000 heads of lettuce a month with 12 greenhouses," James says.

The growth of the business is due, in part, to people becoming more interested in where their food originates. James says consumers often don't know where their food comes from, how it's been handled and by whom. The H2Greux greenhouses have a streamlined operation that allows the company to know who performed each step in the production and when.

Hydroponically grown lettuce also lasts longer than its soil-grown counterpart because the roots are still attached, meaning the plant is still alive.

"Our diets have been nutrient-robbed," James says. "Our lettuce is nutrient dense and has a low risk of contamination."

The contamination issue has become a concern for grocery shoppers following outbreaks of bacterial pathogens, such as E. coli and listeria, which can lead to serious illness and have required product recalls.

As an illustration of one of the benefits of hydroponic

agriculture, lettuce would not normally grow in Louisiana because it likes a cooler climate. In a greenhouse, however, the humidity and temperature can be controlled. "Environmentally controlled agriculture is where it's at," James says. "We're trying to put Louisiana on the map for lettuce."

A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Commercial growing is mixed with education at AgriAquaculture Center of Excellence in Harvey. Part of the Louisiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the center produces fresh, sustainable lettuce in a 3,800-square-foot greenhouse using a 7,000-gallon aquaponics system that turns the filtered waste of channel catfish into fertilizer. The fish are not harvested because they are seen as long-term residents.

According to the center, this approach ensures a continuous and reliable source of natural fertilizer, reducing the need for on-site fish processing and eliminating disruptions in fertilizer production.

In addition to a growing cycle that can go from seed to harvest anywhere from 30 to 75 days depending on factors such as plant genetics, temperature and nutrient levels, the operation's aquaponics system uses 90% less water than traditional farming.

The center is a commercial demonstration facility that educates those looking to dip their toes into the field of

controlled-environment agriculture, as well as showing stakeholders and elected officials what can be done with this type of operation.

To eradicate food insecurity, food production has to adopt and adapt to new technologies and methods of farming, says Paul Begue, the center's program coordinator.

The operation's primary mission is to promote economic resilience and job creation within the agri-aquaculture sector, supporting small businesses through comprehensive technical assistance, educational programs and collaboration opportunities.

While there will still be traditional farming, particularly for animal feed and crops—such as root vegetables—that can't be grown hydroponically, Paul says there are lots of benefits to hydroponic and aquaponic food production. With traditional farm work, the labor can be hard on the human body and is often undertaken in harsh conditions. The climate is also unpredictable. Not only does indoor farming address those issues, it allows farmers to diversify and control their own prices.

"Our costs are predictable," James says. "We have not changed our prices in years."

Hydroponics and aquaponics provide STEM pathways in agriculture, creating jobs for those who might have previously never considered a career in the field.

"Young people like this," Paul says. "It's tech they understand being used to grow food."

He says the center is seeking a grant to start a youth education program in 2026.

As of mid-November 2025, the center produced 6.5 tons of leafy greens and herbs, with the goal of hitting 8 tons by the end

of the year. It harvests between 1,200 to 1,900 heads of lettuce a week. When considering one head of romaine lettuce grown in a greenhouse space can make three side salads, that lettuce can feed a lot of people. In fact, the operation donates about 80% of what it grows to food banks, churches, senior centers and others who need fresh greens—up to 5,700 people affected positively every week. The donations are among the terms of a grant secured by Rep. Troy A. Carter Sr. for the center's operations.

"It's a community garden on steroids, on a small scale," Paul says.

Future Growth

If the past is any indicator, the future of alternate farming methods looks bright. Controlled-environment agriculture—a category that includes greenhouses, hydroponics, vertical farms and aquaponics—operations in the United States more than doubled from 1,476 in 2009 to 2,994 in 2019, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service. Production increased about 56% during that period.

According to Grand View Research, a market research and consulting company, the U.S. hydroponics market value was \$506.3 million in 2023. It is projected to grow at around a 10.7% compound annual growth rate from 2024-2030.

Even with those statistics, don't expect familiar fields of crops to disappear.

"Our climate allows for almost year-round traditional production," Mark says. "However, hydroponics offers a quick turnaround and the ability to grow in controlled environments, which can help mitigate weather-related risks and soil limitations. These systems have the potential to expand as technology improves and as demand for locally grown, high-quality produce continues to rise. While they won't replace conventional farming, they can complement it by providing diversification and sustainability options for growers." ■



ABOVE: AACE Project Coordinator Paul Begue speaks to a group of visitors to the center. **LEFT:** Kylie Miller, greenhouse seed operation assistant, shows trays of lettuce to Jefferson County Parish Councilwoman At-Large Jennifer Van Vrancken and her staff.



Behind the Winter Chill

Did you know heating uses far more energy than cooling?

During winter weather, when all 120,000 DEMCO meters are drawing power simultaneously—running heaters, appliances and other devices—system demand climbs quickly, and the risk of outages increases.

The good news is that the opposite is also true. When we all work together to reduce use, even small steps help lighten the load. Being mindful of energy use during extreme cold helps reduce strain on the grid and supports reliability for everyone.

Though DEMCO has never had to implement a scheduled load reduction to relieve grid stress, it's important to understand how the system protects itself. When equipment senses dangerous conditions or extreme overload, protective devices automatically shut off power in certain areas to prevent damage and help avoid longer, more widespread outages.

During extreme cold weather—especially when ice and snow are involved—every small change makes a big difference in keeping our grid strong for all of us. ■

Power Smart Tips

- ▶ Lower your thermostat by a few degrees between 5–8 a.m. and 5–9 p.m.
- ▶ Stagger the use of high-demand appliances, such as your oven, dishwasher, washer and dryer.
- ▶ Use cold water to wash clothes and dishes to reduce demand from electric water heating.
- ▶ Turn off outside pond or fountain pumps, video game consoles and computers.
- ▶ Seal drafts by using rolled towels or blankets around windows and doors to keep in warm air.



NEW Time-of-use rates are available for members who want more direct control over their electric bill. TOU pricing offers lower off-peak and super off-peak rates in exchange for shifting some energy use to those lower-cost hours. Learn more at DEMCO.org/rates.

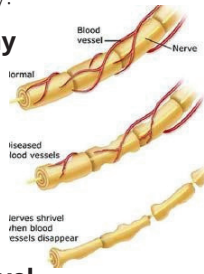
WARNING - WARNING - WARNING

If Your Hands, Arms, Feet, or Legs Are Numb - If You Feel Shooting or Burning Pain or An Electric Sensation - You Are at Risk Don't Let Creeping Nerve Death Ruin Your Life

Get The Help You Need - Here's What You Need to Know...

Purvis, MS - If you experience numbness or tingling in your hands, arms, legs, or feet or if you experience shooting or burning pain, this is important. Please read this carefully.

Peripheral Neuropathy is when small blood vessels in the hands, arms, feet or legs become diseased and tiny nerves that keep the cells and muscles working properly shrivel up and die.



Early-warning symptoms include tingling and numbness, mild loss of feeling in your hands, arms, legs or feet, inability to feel your feet, which increases your risk of foot-injury and falling.

More Advanced Symptoms Include...

- Loss of coordination & dexterity, which puts you at increased risk of accidents.
- Inability to feel clothing like socks and gloves.
- High risk of falling, which makes walking dangerous, and makes you more dependent on others.
- Burning sensations in your arms, legs, hands or feet that may start mild, but as nerves and muscles die, may feel like you're being burned by a blow torch.

Ignore the early warning signals long enough and you risk progressive nerve damage leading to muscle wasting, severe pain, loss of balance and a lot of staying at home wishing you didn't hurt.

When every step is like walking on hot coals, sitting still may be the only thing you feel like doing. But there's little joy in sitting still all day long.



Without treatment, nerve degeneration that begins with slight tingling or numbness may lead to a hot burning sensation and intense pain. Without treatment muscle wasting, loss of mobility and loss of independence is often the next step.

Now here's the scary part....

- Nerve damage **CAUSES** cell damage.
- Cell damage **SPEEDS UP** nerve degeneration

Without treatment this can become a DOWN-WARD SPIRAL that accelerates.

The damage can get worse fast. Mild symptoms intensify. Slight tingling, numbness or lack of feeling can turn into burning pain.

Before you know it, damage can become so bad you hurt all the time.

Unless this downward spiral is stopped and nerves return to proper function - the damage to nerves and cells in the affected area can get so bad your muscles begin to die right along with the nerves and cells. And that sets the stage for weakness, loss of mobility, disability, and dependence on others.

If you have early warning signs of peripheral neuropathy, (tingling &/or numbness, loss of feeling or pain) it's **CRITICAL** you get proper treatment.

It's critical, because with proper treatment the symptoms can often be reversed. Without it, you are playing Russian Roulette with your health.

Once your nerve loss reaches 85%, odds are there's nothing any doctor can do to help.

The most common method your doctor may recommend to treat neuropathy is prescription drugs



Drugs like Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, & Neurontin are often prescribed to manage the pain. But, damaged nerves and dying cells do not heal on their own.

Pain pills do not restore healthy nerve function. They just mask the pain as the nerves continue to degenerate and cells and muscle continue to die.

Taking endless drugs and suffering terrible side effects that may damage your liver & kidney and create even more problems, is not a reasonable path. You deserve better.

Three things must be determined to effectively treat neuropathy. 1) What is the underlying cause? 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained? 3) How much treatment your condition will require?

With proper treatment, shriveled blood vessels grow back & nerves can return to proper function. How much treatment you may need depends on your condition.

At **Purvis Chiropractic** we do a complete neuropathy sensitivity exam to determine the extent of your nerve damage. The exam includes a detailed sensory evaluation, extensive peripheral vascular testing, & a detailed analysis of the findings.

Dr. Rob Acord, D.C. will be offering this complete neuropathy sensitivity exam for **\$47**. This special offer goes away at the end of this month as we have a limited number of exam appointments available.

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OF SOUTH LOUISIANA
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At DEMCO, the strength of our cooperative is reflected in the people who bring its values to life each day. Among them, Maintenance and Facilities Crew Leader Jeff Lea stands out as a calm, compassionate presence whose commitment has shaped our operations and culture.

This August, Jeff celebrates 18 years with DEMCO. Those years were marked by humility, consistency and a genuine commitment to serving others.

Jeff's workday starts before 5 a.m., ensuring all facilities are safe, prepared and ready for the day

before most employees arrive. Colleagues appreciate his attentiveness to small and large tasks that keep operations running smoothly. His approachable nature, easy smile and sincere greetings make him someone that employees naturally gravitate toward.

Jeff's care doesn't stop at the workplace. Just as colleagues are drawn to him at work, animals respond to his gentle attention and compassion. His deep empathy for animals led him to volunteer at local shelters where he could make a tangible difference in their lives. After hours, he can often be found walking



Support Rescue, Rehome, Repeat

To support, visit rescuerehomerepeat.com/feed-the-pack.html. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps make life a little brighter for an animal on their journey to adoption.



dogs, cleaning cages and comforting nervous pups.

Jeff volunteers regularly with Rescue, Rehome, Repeat, a volunteer-run organization in Livingston Parish that provides a second chance for animals in need. It's also where he met Smokey, the energetic rescue dog that he and his wife adopted earlier this year.

Jeff's volunteer work embodies DEMCO's cooperative principle of Concern for Community—extending care beyond people to all living beings and showing that true service comes from empathy, action and commitment.

His efforts have inspired fellow employees to support shelter work and adopt rescue animals, further strengthening the

cooperative spirit that connects DEMCO to the communities it serves.

"You can donate your time, your money, or your home by fostering or adopting," Jeff says, while encouraging others to get involved. "Every little bit makes a difference."

Jeff's story is a reminder that DEMCO is more than a power provider; it is a community of people who care deeply for their work, their neighbors and those who cannot speak for themselves. Every act of kindness—whether helping a neighbor, volunteering at a shelter or comforting an animal waiting for a safe home—strengthens the communities we share. ■

TOP LEFT: Jeff and Roxie Lea take a walk in the snow with Smokey. **RIGHT:** Jeff and Roxie visit pups during an adoption weekend event.

OPPOSITE: Jeff Lea holds Smokey alongside Roxie outside Rescue, Rehome, Repeat on Smokey's one-year adoption anniversary.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEFF LEA

Generate Safely

Don't create problems with your backup generator

By Scott Flood

The wind howls outside your windows as a winter storm system blows through the area in the late evening. Your lights flicker for a moment or two before you're plunged into darkness. The social media feed on your phone is packed with reports of damage and power outages, and the storm shows no sign of letting up for hours.

Fortunately, you had the foresight to buy a backup generator big enough to handle your refrigerator, freezer and other key needs. Flashlight in hand, you attach extension cords. Within minutes, you hear the quiet humming that tells you they're working again.

Your electric utility understands power outages are a major inconvenience, and its employees do their best to prevent them. But when severe weather rolls through, outages can sometimes stretch into several hours or even days after a major storm. Lineworkers may have to check many miles of power lines to pinpoint the problems before they can begin their work to restore service. That's why many consumers consider buying backup generators to provide for their families' needs while waiting for service to resume.

Backup generators fall into one of two categories. Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system by a qualified electrician. They come in various sizes so homeowners can match the generator to their home's power needs.

Portable generators, as the name implies, can be moved to wherever they are needed. Because they're small enough to move, they generally provide less power than

standby models. Most use gasoline or diesel fuel. When operated correctly, both types provide a safe source of backup power.

Proper Installation Matters

Some homeowners make the mistake of plugging their backup generators directly into a wall outlet or connecting them to their home's electrical panel.

Beyond the significant risk of electrocution and fire that can create, plugging generators directly into outlets can send the voltage the generator creates into the power lines connecting homes to the electric grid. That creates a dangerous condition called backfeed, which can seriously injure lineworkers who are working hard to restore electricity, as well as anyone who accidentally comes in contact with power lines. Backfeed can also damage the generator.

These potential hazards are why permanently installed generators are





ABOVE: Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system by a qualified electrician. PHOTO COURTESY OF KOHLER **OPPOSITE PAGE:** If you buy a portable backup generator, protect your home and family by taking the time to read the manufacturer's instructions. PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF BRYAN, TEXAS

required to have a transfer switch, which should be installed by a qualified electrician. The transfer switch creates a barrier between your home's electrical system and outside wires so backfeed cannot occur. When the transfer switch senses power has been restored, it switches the power from the generator back to the outside lines.

The biggest danger associated with backup generators is one that's invisible and deadly. Because backup generators burn fossil fuels, they generate a variety of gases, most notably carbon monoxide (CO). One portable generator can produce as much CO as hundreds of cars, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The agency reports nearly 100 Americans die each year because of CO poisoning from backup generators. That's why generators should only be used in dry, well-ventilated areas away from your home and garage.

CO gas is also odorless. The National Institutes of Health warns that CO can kill in as little as five minutes. People exposed to CO typically become dizzy, feel nauseated and experience headaches. Often, they lose consciousness before noticing any symptoms. Anyone exposed to CO should be moved to fresh air immediately.

If you buy a portable generator, protect your home and family by taking the time to read the manufacturer's instructions. Don't use portable generators in rainy or wet conditions unless you keep them well-ventilated and dry.

When starting a portable generator, make sure nothing is plugged into it. You can reduce the potential for damage to your appliances and lighting by turning them off or unplugging them from the wall. After the generator starts, plug them in and turn them on one at a time to



ADOBE STOCK AI ILLUSTRATION BY HMDHASAN

Stay Grounded With Generator Safety Tips

- ▶ Never connect a portable generator directly to your home's wiring. Standby generators must be permanently wired by a qualified electrician.
- ▶ Always plug appliances directly into generators.
- ▶ Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords.
- ▶ Ensure your generator is properly grounded.
- ▶ Never overload a generator.
- ▶ Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- ▶ Keep the generator dry.
- ▶ Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
- ▶ Never fuel a generator while it is operating.
- ▶ Read and adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation.

Information courtesy of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

make sure you aren't overloading your generator's capacity.

Unplug them from the generator before turning off the generator. Unless the manufacturer recommends otherwise, always turn the generator off and allow it to cool before adding fuel.

Finally, as with many home appliances, regular maintenance is the key to ensuring your portable generator operates safely for years to come. When storing it, drain the fuel from the tank. In addition, check the oil and fuel levels, filters and other components once a season so you know it will be ready to run safely and efficiently the next time a big storm blows through. ■

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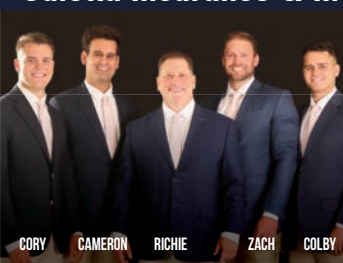
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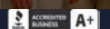
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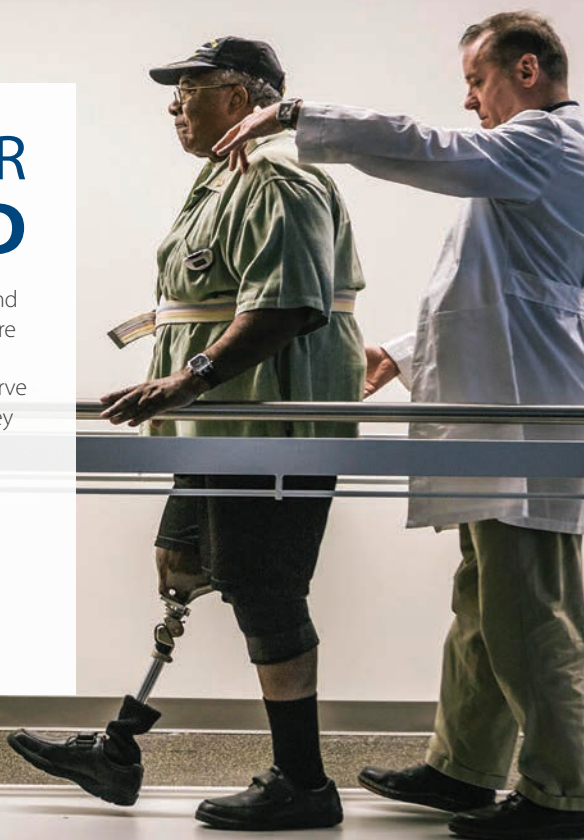
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TIPS TO AVOID **ENERGY SCAMS**



Beware of “winter bill relief” energy scams. Scammers often exploit high winter bills by offering fake discount or relief programs to unsuspecting co-op members. They may ask for upfront payments or personal details to lower your rate. Legitimate utilities never demand gift cards, wire transfers or payment through apps like PayPal or Venmo. Always verify offers directly by calling your co-op’s phone number located on your energy bill—do not call any phone numbers provided in a suspicious email or text. Remember to take time to confirm before you pay. Real savings programs won’t pressure you for immediate action.

