



# From bee to hive to bottle

BY BRITTNEE WILSON

**I**t might be surprising that one of the coldest states in the nation is first in honey production. If you guessed North Dakota, you'd be correct. Each year, the Peace Garden State easily outproduces every state by at least double. In 2020, the state produced over 38 million pounds of honey, according to the N.D. Department of Agriculture, valued at over \$61 million.

What makes North Dakota one of the best areas in the country for supporting honeybee populations? There are a couple contributing factors - the wide array of pollinator-friendly plants and trees in the state and North Dakota's summertime climate is just right, without being excessively hot or cold.

So, how exactly does honey get from North Dakota fields to a bottle in your pantry? For answers, we visited with beekeeper and Northern Plains Electric Cooperative member, Cory Schwarz, the owner of Absolute Honey LLC.

With over 28 years of experience in the honeybee industry, Schwarz was first introduced when he helped his uncle haul semitruck loads of bees in 1994. From that experience, he was hooked - or stuck - on all things honey. For years, Schwarz worked on a honeybee farm near Bismarck, learning the ins and outs before starting his own company in 2015. Today, Absolute Honey is one of the most prominent bee producers in the state.

Beekeeping tends to be a family-oriented business, and Cory works with his wife, Candace Molitor, her son, Gary, daughter-in-law, Delaney, and granddaughters, Oaklee and Burlee Molitor, to run four honey farms around the Midwest. They are headquartered in Mylo, with locations in Hettinger, Belle Fourche, S.D., and



Beulah, Wyo. They also work with Cory's brother, Josh Schwarz, and Josh's fiancée, Ashley Hondl, along with 14 seasonal workers.

## Making the rounds

Each year, Absolute Honey's bees travel thousands of miles, not on their wings, but via the highways around

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the United States. In November, the family hauls the bees by semitrucks to California's almond orchards to provide pollination services, before moving to Texas

in April to start new colonies. Cory and his family travel to Texas, where they split the hives, re-queen the colonies and wait for them to build. In May, the hives are ready to be shipped to their four honey houses in the Midwest.

A beehive is designed to hold eight to 10 wooden frames that hold the honeycomb. Absolute Honey will usually stack two hives together to create one hive. Each hive houses one queen bee and about 80,000 worker bees.

"We get an average of 80 to 100 pounds of honey per hive," Cory said.

The family sets around 16,000 hives in about 425 locations near canola, alfalfa and sweet clover. Farmers do not charge rent to set the hives on their land, but get repaid in honey. Bees are a vital part of the agriculture business and farmers are very welcoming.

Bees pollinate and gather nectar to create honey and store as food, because it provides the energy for their flights as well as heat for the hive in the winter. Honey is stored in a comb and, fortunately, honeybees will make more honey than the colony needs, so beekeepers harvest the excess. In mid-July, all of Absolute Honey's supers, which are the boxes placed on a beehive to store honey, are shipped to their Mylo location, where the honey-extracting equipment is used.



*Absolute Honey is a family business, headquartered in Mylo, and includes, left to right, **Cory Schwarz** and **Candace Molitor** alongside **Gary, Burlee, Delaney** and **Oaklee Molitor** (front).*

## Extracting process

First, the supers are unloaded into a "hot room," where the temperature is maintained around 100 degrees to make the wax and honey more pliable. After two to three days, the supers are moved into the extraction room, where the frames are loaded into a machine, which scrapes off the wax cap that bees make to seal honey

in each cell. Once the caps are removed, the frames are placed in an extractor, a centrifuge that spins the frames, forcing honey out of the comb. After the honey is extracted, it's strained to remove any remaining wax and other particles.

After the honey is strained, Absolute Honey loads the honey into 55-gallon drums for bulk resale, which gets shipped to retailers in Colorado, Kansas and Michigan. Smaller bottles are packaged for gifts to the farmers and to keep on hand for local sales. On average, Absolute Honey produces 1 million pounds of pure honey a year.

Beekeeping is a satisfying and rewarding profession. It takes a lot of patience and hard work to keep the colonies healthy and overwinter successfully.

"2021 was pretty much devastating," Cory said.



Beehive supers, which are the boxes placed on top of a beehive for bees to store honey, are designed to hold eight to 10 wooden frames that hold the honeycomb.



**Oaklee Molitor** and her father, **Gary**, check the hives.

The statewide drought caused a short bloom season for trees and plants, so the bees missed out on a lot of pollen. Not only did that decrease the amount of honey produced, but also caused a lack of nutrition for the bees.

“We lost a lot of bees over the winter this year,” Cory said.

Looking forward, the Absolute Honey crew is optimistic for the future. They continue to fight to keep their bees healthy and strong, while creating an environment for hives to thrive.

“Dealing with challenges is just part of the job,” Cory said. “We are proud to produce an American product, while helping with pollination across America.”

Honeybees are vitally important to the survival and health of agricultural crops. Without our American beekeepers, there would be no local food, no “farm to table.” American beekeepers contribute to nearly every meal we eat, and buying their honey makes this essential job possible.

To learn more about Absolute Honey, email [absolutehoney369@outlook.com](mailto:absolutehoney369@outlook.com). ■

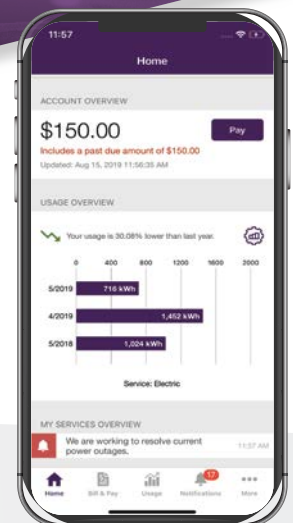


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# DON'T LET THE CHILL AFFECT YOUR BILL



When cold weather approaches, you can keep your home comfortable and still keep your energy bills from escalating with these winter tips from Northern Plains Electric Cooperative:

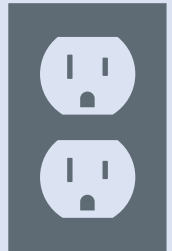
## BUNDLE UP YOUR HOME

Check around doors and windows for leaks and drafts. Add weatherstripping and caulk where heat might escape. Make sure doors seal properly.



## PLUG THE PLUG

Electric wall plugs and switches can allow cold air to enter. Purchase simple-to-install, foam gaskets that fit behind the switch plate and effectively prevent leaks.



## CLOSE THE DAMPER

Don't forget to close the damper on your fireplace when the fireplace is not in use. If the damper is open when you're not using the fireplace, your chimney functions as a large open window that draws warm air out of the room and creates a draft.

## CHECK YOUR HEATING SYSTEM

Get a routine maintenance and inspection of your heating system each autumn to make sure it is in good working order.

## CHANGE THE FILTER

Be sure to clean or replace your system's air filter. At a minimum, change the filter every three months; a dirty filter clogs the system, making the system work harder to keep you warm.

## CHECK YOUR INSULATION

Insulate your attic. In an older home, that can be the most cost-efficient way to cut home heating costs. Before energy efficiency standards, homes were often built with little or no insulation. As a result, large amounts of heat can be lost through walls, floors and ceilings.

## CHANGE A LIGHT BULB

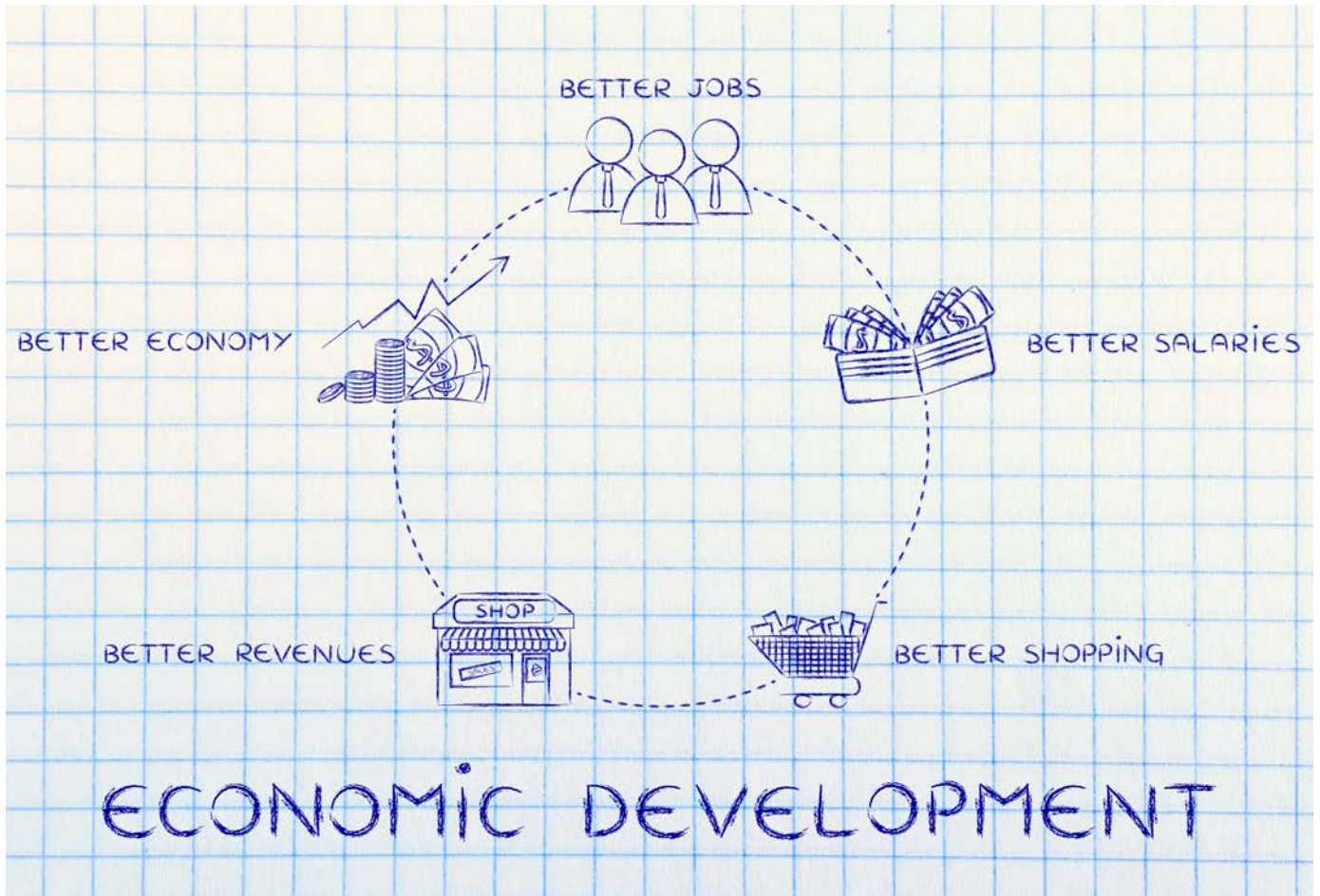
Lighting our homes can represent 20% of home electricity bills and is one of the easiest places to start saving energy with more energy-efficient bulbs.



## LOWER THE THERMOSTAT

Lowering the setting on your thermostat will result in savings, too!





## Northern Plains can provide loans through economic development

**N**orthern Plains Electric Cooperative is helping economic development efforts in the area by administering a revolving loan fund made possible with funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Loans with only 2% interest and minimal administrative fees are available to businesses, nonprofits organizations, and government and tribal entities through the revolving loan fund.

Eligible applicants can receive a loan amount minimum of \$10,000 and a maximum amount is dependent on the funds available. The money was provided by a grant from USDA. And there is no risk to the cooperative. The funds will eventually be paid back to USDA.

The objectives of the revolving loan fund include:

- Help create jobs that will help rural areas.
- Provide financing alternatives for business or community facilities with an economically or socially desirable purpose.
- Leverage owner equity and other financing sources.
- Promote development of rural communities

For full details of the revolving loan program, visit [www.nplains.com](http://www.nplains.com) and find the information under our “Economic Development” page through the “Member Services” tab or contact our business manager, Cheryl Belle, at 800-822-2500. ■



North Dakota students with Sen. **John Hoeven** (center) at Capitol Hill Day during the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

## Electric Cooperative Youth Tour: a life-changing experience

**F**or over 50 years, teens from rural America have been traveling to Washington, D.C., on the “trip of a lifetime,” the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, courtesy of their local sponsoring electric cooperative.

This June, 14 North Dakota high school students enjoyed an intensive week packed with touring museums, monuments and memorials, and learning about government, history and the cooperative business.

Among those students was Alliana Freund, a senior at North Star High School and the daughter of Northern Plains Electric Cooperative members Angela Freud and Patrick Freund of Cando.

Alliana and over 1,200 teenagers across America heard national speakers address the important role electric cooperatives play in their local communities at Capitol Hill Day. After touring the Capitol, the North Dakota students met with Sen. John Hoeven and Rep. Kelly Armstrong in a private setting. They learned about issues concerning their home state and even got to ask any question they had.

“Being in D.C., I got to see what my history textbooks talked about. I saw firsthand the White House, Ford’s Theatre, the Washington Monument, Arlington Cemetery, Mount Vernon and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Reading about them is interesting, but actually getting to experience these places puts

in perspective how huge the world actually is,” Alliana said.

For more information on the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, email Brittnee Wilson at [brittneew@nplains.com](mailto:brittneew@nplains.com). ■



**Alliana Freund** stands in front of the reflecting pool at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Alliana and students visited the landmark while attending the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

# Lineworkers participate in Hotline School

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperative (NDAREC) hosted 60 lineworkers and apprentice lineworkers at Hotline School in July. Held at NDAREC’s training grounds in Mandan, the annual field training teaches lineworkers how to safely work on energized lines through hands-on instruction and demonstrations from experienced lineworkers.

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) uses a rotating system to send lineworkers from across our service area to participate in the program. This year, NPEC was able to send seven employees to Hotline School.

NDAREC is the trade association for the state’s 16 distribution co-ops and five generation and



PHOTO BY LIZA KESSEL/NDAREC

**Laine Hoyt**, Northern Plains Electric Cooperative lineworker, works on an energized line at Hotline School hosted by NDAREC.

transmission co-ops in North Dakota, including Northern Plains Electric Cooperative. NDAREC provides services in communications, government relations, safety training, professional development and economic development. ■

# NPEC takes opportunity to teach children about lineworkers

This summer, the Cando Community Library reached out to local businesses to serve as a stop in a “pirate treasure hunt” for its summer reading program.

Around 60 children made their way to nine participating businesses using a treasure map, including Northern Plains Electric’s Cando office, in hopes of finding treasure.

At NPEC, each child received a “hardhat,” a tasty treat and a coloring page illustrating the special gear lineworkers wear to stay safe on the job. Then, the “apprentice lineworkers” were able to pose as a real lineworker on duty by a cardboard cutout.

“We were happy to see their smiling faces and teach them a little something about a lineworker’s job,” said Communications Specialist Brittnee Wilson. ■



**Leo**, age 5, is the son of Northern Plains Electric Cooperative members Matt and Michelle Swanson.

# Do you have electric heat? Check that breaker!

Often, members turn off their breaker to their heat meter through the summer months and forget to turn it back on heading into fall. If the breaker is off to the meter, the meter will not register, and the member will not be credited for the lower rate of electric heat.

If you already have an off-peak meter and your breaker is switched to the “ON” position, you do not need to do anything.

Don't have an electric heat meter?

One thing that can help members save during cold winter months is having a heat meter installed. An electric heat meter records your heat usage only. When electric demand and market prices are high, an off-peak device in the home automatically switches from an electric source to a backup source, such as propane or fuel oil. In exchange, participating members receive discounted off-peak rates, which are competitive with fuel oil and propane. Our off-peak program is designed to reduce electric demand during peak times and save money.

If you are heating with electric heat and do not have a heat meter, please contact the NPEC office at 800-882-2500 to learn more. ■



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