

Chelsey Erdmann proudly represents the sixth generation of her family farm and ranch, all while including her children, the seventh generation, in everyday farm life.



Bridging the gap between farmers and consumers one post at a time

BY BRITTNEE WILSON

Knowing where our food originates is something North Dakotans inherently know. Even if you didn't grow up on a farm, passing by vast golden wheatfields and grazing livestock makes farm life visible to everyone.

But what if you didn't have the privilege of growing up here? Would you understand the sacrifices it takes to put food on the table? Through bitter winters, unpredictable weather and fluctuating commodity prices, North Dakota farmers and ranchers are among the toughest people on Earth.

Chelsey Erdmann, a sixth-generation North Dakota farmer and rancher, has seen firsthand how disconnected from agriculture many consumers have become. She understands for some Americans, milk begins at the grocery store rather than with the dairy farmer. To combat this perception, she utilizes her blog, ohthatchelsey.com, and social media channels to help educate people about rural life practices and how food comes from families. Families like hers.

Farm, faith and family

For Erdmann, that connection to agriculture began long before social media. It was rooted in the family farm where she was raised near New Rockford, growing corn, soybeans, pinto beans, seed oats and commercial cattle. Working alongside her grandparents and parents instilled a strong work ethic

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in her and her two younger brothers.

Although Erdmann had a deep appreciation for agriculture, she wasn't entirely sure what path she wanted to take after high school. She cast a broad net as a safe bet and went into agricultural economics. After graduation, she accepted a job with an agriculture equipment dealer, all while building her cowherd at the family farm after hours.

While her career kept her connected to agriculture, something was missing. The farm wasn't simply where she grew up. It felt like a member of the family calling her home. As years passed, the pull to the farm was impossible to ignore. Erdmann realized her future was on the family farm, carrying on the legacy that had shaped her.

"Growing up, my parents were gracious and made it clear that if any or all of us kids wanted a place on the farm, there would be room," Erdmann says.

After her grandparents retired, she took a leap of faith and left her salaried paycheck to ranch and farm full time with her family. In the meantime, she got married to Kyle, who owns and operates a fencing supply company, and they started a family.

When their first child was born, Chelsey never imagined her son would spend each day alongside her at work. But bringing him to the farm quickly became part of their daily routine. Being alongside her parents, brother and grandparents, there were always helping hands nearby.

"Bringing the kids along to work with us all day, every day was never a grand plan, but now that we're doing it, I'm so grateful for the village that makes it happen!" Chelsey says.

As the Northern Plains Electric Cooperative member goes about her day, she often pauses to capture snippets of what is happening around the farm and the joys and momentary hardships of being a working mom to share on Instagram with friends and family.

Building a connection

That desire to share the realities of farm life found an unexpected turn in 2020. Chelsey explains a talk show host from California made untrue comments about animal agriculture. She felt a deep calling to make a public post to showcase the way her family raised cattle in North Dakota, producing food for families across America.

Although nobody from the talk show team responded, she received positive feedback from around the country on her viewpoint and that lit a fire inside her. She continued to publicly share daily chores, family life and animal care to dispel food misconceptions. She has been consistently sharing ever since.

"Advocating for agriculture is something that my



family has always done," Chelsey says. "Sharing online is a heart project for me. This life is special and I wanted our perspective to have a voice."

Today, with over 300,000 followers across multiple social media platforms, Chelsey's posts have evolved into farm safety and strategy, how to manage money and showcasing rural family life that often includes her young children.

Followers enjoy her "Money Mondays," "Safety Saturdays" and a fan favorite, "Empty buddy seat, come along for the ride" segments.

"Farm life is magical. Ranch life is magical. And I think it should be shared," Chelsey says.

Her most viral video, with over 119 million views, shows Chelsey harvesting corn with three of her children napping in the combine cab. The caption reads: "It's never lost on me how special this way of life is, but it does hit harder seeing people think it's AI. No, this is real. This is normal. This is common. Food comes from families. Families like ours. Stick around, we'd like to show you what it's all about."

Having her children along has been her greatest gift, Chelsey says. By having them learn by doing rather than seeking out specific life lessons teaches situational awareness and gives them the tools to make safe decisions.

"In the moment, it's also been the hardest thing I've ever done, splitting my brain between the task at hand, efficiency of keeping with the rest of the crew, keeping the kids safe and keeping them comfortable while we work is hard, really hard in the moment," she says.

Any farmer or rancher can tell you farm life can be stressful. But by sharing her personal daily experiences, she is building trust with her audience and opening conversations about modern food production.

"There's something powerful about knowing where your food comes from, how it was grown and by whom," Chelsey says.

Prepared not panicked

Chelsey's commitment to agriculture extends beyond telling its story. She also believes protecting the people who make that story possible is just as important. As the farm's self-appointed safety coordinator, Chelsey looks for ways to prevent accidents before they happen. She often shares the safety practices she teaches her children, especially around large equipment.

"The more we can plan, anticipate and take precautions, the more we can be prepared in the event of an emergency. Having the kids here with us has helped us hold ourselves to the safety standards we know we should follow, but sometimes let lax," she says.

Chelsey's heightened awareness of farm safety eventually grew into a desire to educate and support her community. In 2025, Chelsey gathered community leaders to put together a free safety workshop on ways to be prepared and not panicked in an emergency. Speakers included local EMS on ways to stop the bleed and hands-only CPR. Insight on

how the state radio works and responding to a grain entrapment was shared. And Northern Plains Electric had two lineworkers present on how one can respond to an electrical emergency before EMS arrives.

"We have incredible volunteers and community members here, so it felt like the perfect opportunity to do this together," Chelsey says.

The workshop was such a success, the committee has plans for another free workshop to take place in Fessenden on March 17.

Whether she's organizing community workshops or sharing her farm lifestyle through social media, Chelsey's goal has never been about gaining followers or recognition. Instead, she hopes to create a better understanding of agriculture by inviting people into the everyday realities of farming and ranching.

Through honest conversations, she's showing behind every meal is a family working through long days, uncertain weather and unwavering dedication. In doing so, she's helping bridge the gap between farmers and consumers, one post at a time. ■

"Food comes from families. Families like ours."

- Chelsey Erdmann



Avoid HARVEST HAZARDS this fall

Power lines and other equipment are necessary to deliver electricity to hardworking farmers and ranchers, but those same power lines can also be deadly if not treated with respect.

Harvest means long hours, increased stress and tight schedules. But Northern Plains Electric Cooperative urges farmers to watch for electrical hazards around the farm or ranch, especially during harvest season.

BE AWARE

- Be aware of overhead power lines and keep equipment and extensions far away from them.
- Always keep equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air.
- Use care when raising augers or the bed of a grain truck. It can be difficult to estimate distance, and a power line may be closer than it looks.
- Always lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators to their lowest possible level before moving or transporting them. Encourage folding and unfolding to be done well into the field, not at the field's edge, which could have power lines running next to it.

USE A SPOTTER

- Avoid moving large equipment alone. Have someone watch as you move equipment to ensure you are clear of power lines. Don't rely on auto-steer around power lines and poles.

REALIZE THINGS CHANGE

- If you have purchased new equipment, be aware of antennas or other attachments that may pose new hazards. A newer, bigger piece of equipment may no longer clear a line. In addition, shifting soil may also affect whether or not machinery avoids power lines from year-to-year.
- Wind, uneven ground, shifting weight or other conditions can cause you to lose control of equipment and make contact with power lines.
- Power lines also may sag over the years. If power lines on your property are sagging, contact your electric cooperative to repair the lines. Never try to move a power line on your own.

EDUCATE THE CREW

- Look over work areas carefully for overhead power lines and utility poles. Make sure you, your family and

employees know the location of overhead power lines, and use routes to avoid the lines when moving equipment. Do this every year, as equipment sizes and soil conditions may change.

LOOK AROUND

- Overhead power lines are not the only electric hazard on the farm. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when one of the guy wires is broken, it can become charged with electricity. If you break a guy wire, call the cooperative to fix it. Don't do it yourself.

USE THE PROFESSIONALS

- Use qualified electricians for work on drying equipment and other farm electrical systems. ■





In May, 46 sixth-grade students from Carrington Elementary School toured the Antelope Valley Station power plant and the Freedom Mine coal plant through our power provider, Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

Welcome back, students!

As the new school year kicks off, Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC) shares the many educational opportunities provided to students. You can find more information on each program by visiting our website, nplains.com, or be sure to read future issues of *North Dakota Living* for announcements. Any questions can be directed toward Brittnee at 800-882-2500.

Power plant tour program

A full-day tour provides students with great insight into one of the North Dakota's brightest and most important industries. Students will come away with an understanding of the complexity of generating electricity and will learn about the many job opportunities available in North Dakota's energy industry.

To help defray costs, the co-op offers financial assistance to schools located within NPEC's service area that book a tour.

Scholarships

The Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship program recognizes and encourages the academic achievements of students in the region. It also serves as an investment in the economic future of rural areas. Together with Basin Electric, scholarships are awarded to NPEC member dependents who are selected each year.

Additional scholarship opportunities have been given at our annual meeting in a luck-of-the-draw format.

Electric Cooperative Youth Tour

This essay-writing contest is an opportunity for one lucky winner to enjoy a week filled with educational learning and sightseeing in an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., compliments of NPEC.

Kids safety poster contest

By hosting a safety poster contest, NPEC intends to initiate conversations between children and parents/teachers about the dangers of electricity and ways one should practice safety. The yearly contest is open to elementary-aged students and the cooperative offers cash prizes to the winners.

Legislative field trips

Electric cooperatives were born in government. An understanding and involvement in government is critical to our success and the successes of the communities we serve. That's why NPEC encourages students to visit the state capital to view North Dakota's legislative process in action. Recognizing school budgets are often tight, NPEC will help defray trip expenses to any high school in the cooperative's service area that takes a student group. ■

Understanding your electric bill

August is typically one of the warmest months of the year, and that means air conditioners across our community are working overtime to keep homes comfortable. During periods of extreme heat, many members may see an increase in their electric bills in September (August usage) and wonder what factors contribute to the cost of electricity.

At Northern Plains Electric Cooperative (NPEC), we believe understanding your electric bill is an important part of being an informed member. While the total amount due may seem like a single number, it actually reflects several different costs associated with delivering reliable electricity to your home or business.

The largest factor is often the amount of energy you use. Electricity is measured in kilowatt-hours (kWh), and the more energy your household consumes, the higher your bill. During the summer, air conditioning is typically the largest driver of increased energy use. When temperatures climb into the 90s or higher, our cooling systems run longer and more frequently, consuming significantly more electricity than they do during milder weather.

Another major factor is the cost of generating or purchasing electricity. Like many cooperatives, NPEC purchases power from Basin Electric Power Cooperative. The cost of producing electricity fluctuates based on fuel prices, including natural gas, coal and other energy resources used to generate power. Changes in wholesale power costs influence the price of electricity delivered to members.

Transmission costs also play a role. Before electricity reaches your home, it must travel across a network of high-voltage transmission lines that connect power plants to local distribution systems. Transmission equipment requires ongoing maintenance and upgrades to ensure reliability, especially as electricity demand continues to grow.

Closer to home, NPEC maintains the local electric distribution system, including utility poles, power lines, transformers, substations and other essential equipment that safely deliver power to members.

Maintaining this equipment is covered through the monthly service availability charge. This is a flat monthly fee all members pay, regardless of how much electricity they use. This fixed fee ensures all members pay a fair share of the basic operational costs required to keep the power grid reliable and ready to serve your home or business. Whether a member uses a little electricity or a lot, we must maintain infrastructure and have crews, equipment and resources available to provide electricity around the clock.

Summer temperatures can also influence costs in less obvious ways. When the demand for electricity is high across a region, wholesale power prices can



increase. Utilities and grid operators must ensure enough generation is available to meet peak demand, and those costs can be reflected throughout the electric system.

The good news is simple steps to lower energy use can make a meaningful difference. Setting your thermostat a few degrees higher when you're away, replacing dirty HVAC filters, using ceiling fans, sealing air leaks and avoiding the use of major appliances during the hottest parts of the day can help reduce energy consumption, lower your bill and reduce strain on the local grid during peak demand.

NPEC's mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity while being transparent about the factors that impact energy costs. We understand every dollar matters, and we are committed to making smart investments that keep the lights on and support the communities we serve.

If you ever have questions about your electric bill or co-op programs designed to help you save, please reach out. We're here to help you make informed decisions that work for your household. ■





Plan and prepare

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative strives to provide you with reliable, uninterrupted service every day of the year, but sometimes Mother Nature creates unavoidable power outages.

"Expect the unexpected" is the focus of National Preparedness Month in September, which encourages everyone to plan for disasters or emergencies in their homes, businesses and communities.

Northern Plains Electric encourages members to take an inventory now of items you need that rely on electricity. Make backup plans if you have medical equipment or assistive technology devices dependent on power for life-sustaining purposes. Then follow some other tips:

- **Build or restock your emergency preparedness kit.** Ensure you have at least one flashlight with extra batteries per household member and a ready supply of nonperishable food and water. Include extra batteries, cash and first-aid supplies and medications.
- **Keep mobile phones and any battery-powered devices charged, and make sure you have backup charging methods, such as a car charger.**
- **Keep your car's gas tank full.** If you use your car to charge devices, do not leave the car running in a garage, partly closed space or near a home to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- **Know where the manual release lever of your electric garage door opener is located and how to operate it.**
- **During a power outage, only use flashlights for lighting.** Avoid using candles, as they could be a fire hazard.

- **Turn off or disconnect appliances and other equipment to protect them from quick power surges.** Whenever possible, use surge protectors.
- **Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.** Generators, camp stoves or charcoal grills should always be used outdoors and at least 20 feet away from windows. Never use a gas stovetop or oven to heat your home. Follow manufacturer instructions.
- **Check on your neighbors.** Older adults and young children are especially vulnerable to extreme temperatures.
- **Keep perishable food cold to avoid illness.** Keep a thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer to monitor the temperature. When in doubt, throw it out! Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40 degrees or higher for two hours or more, or that has an unusual odor, color or texture.
- **If the power is out for more than a day, discard any medication that should be refrigerated.**
- **If you use a generator, follow manufacturer directions.** Most important is the transfer switch that disconnects the farm or home from the power line and connects it to the generator. It must be a double-throw transfer switch, which prevents the generator from feeding electricity back onto the power line. This protects the lineworkers who may be working to restore your service. ■

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?

Having a heat meter installed can help members save during cold winter months. 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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