

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc. , Lewistown, MT

Cream of the West — healthy food for a healthy economy and a healthy community

Story and photos
by Judy Byrne

You might have grown up on Cream of the West. As a hearty and healthful hot breakfast, Cream of the West has been a popular choice for decades. In fact, it is one of the oldest operating businesses in Montana — nearly one hundred years.

Established in 1914, Cream of the West was headquartered in Billings until 2002. When owner Bud Leuthold decided to retire, several Wheatland County farm families saw an opportunity. Together, they bought the company, loaded it lock, stock, and barrel into grain trucks and stock trailers, and hauled everything to Harlowton.

Since the move, ownership of the company has shifted. Now, Alicia and Richard Moe and Steve and Susan Moore have become the primary stockholders. Three other local families maintain partial ownership, but responsibility for running the business falls on the shoulders of Susan and Alicia.

"I'm the CEO and Susan is the CFO," Alicia laughs.

They both perform whatever tasks need doing, but Alicia serves as general manager and primary marketer. Susan does the bookkeeping and maintains the website. If one of these ladies is out of the office or working from home, the other covers to pick up the slack. They are assisted by Liane Kent, a part-time office manager and receptionist.



General Manager of Cream of the West Alicia Moe says the various grains arrive at the warehouse in gigantic totes weighing 1,500 pounds.

In addition to the ladies out front, production manager Bobby Lewis oversees the warehouse. His duties include receiving shipments, processing and packaging the products, and filling orders. His manufacturing and engineering background makes him an invaluable employee. According to Alicia, he can fix anything.

"Our group has life-long roots in this county," says Alicia. "In addition to doing our pricing, my husband Richard runs the ranch his parents owned and where he was raised. Our partners Steve and Susan own the oldest ranch in the

valley. Together, we wanted to bring something to bolster the local economy. Cream of the West seemed a perfect fit for creating a sustainable agricultural foundation."

She continues, "Our mission is to use healthy land to produce healthy food which creates a healthy economy to support a healthy community. We produce hot cereals and mixes from 100 percent all natural Montana whole grains. Montana Milling in Great Falls is our primary source, but we also purchase from Montana Flour & Grains in Fort Benton and from Cereal Foods out of Billings."

Although the company is expanding its product line, two hot cereals form the staples of Cream of the West.

Roasted Wheat comes from only one ingredient: 100 percent hard red spring wheat. The entire kernel is retained, making the cereal low in fat and rich in nutrients. Unlike other products, which remove part of

the kernel, Cream of the West is not fortified and uses no added preservatives, salt, or sugar. According to their advertising, "Removing portions of the kernel and replacing the lost nutrients with a fortification process goes against our grain."

The company's second biggest seller is a hearty combination of barley, oats, triticale, rye and three different kinds of wheat. "Our Roasted Seven Grain is delicious with brown sugar and cinnamon," says Alicia. "It has a satisfying

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Flooding affects service area

Floods hit the co-op's power lines in many areas. One three phase pole south of the Fred Robinson bridge in northeast Fergus County washed out. The three phase underground power line going to the town of Maiden washed out and later this summer or fall, it will need to be replaced. Presently, we are using the old single phase underground power line.

Musselshell River

West of Roundup, along the Musselshell River, a three-phase pole is close to being washed out, so the line is temporarily disconnected. In the Little Belt Mountains, up the South Fork of the Judith River, a single-phase underground wire was broken when the Judith River became very high. The river has continued to flood, so the crews have been unable to repair the underground wire. Hopefully, we can replace the wire soon and restore power to the two cabin sites affected.

In the Little Snowy Mountains, a culvert washed out along the county road and broke a single phase underground power line. As soon as the culvert is replaced, power will be restored. East of Harlowton, along the Musselshell River, a three phase pole is close to being washed out. We are monitoring the situation and currently it is safe.

Judith River

The Judith River near Denton has washed out at least three poles and the irrigation services are all disconnected. It doesn't appear very likely that these services will be reconnected this year. South of Lewistown, in the Forest Grove area, hill slides have caused six poles to slide down hill or lean. We will reroute approximately four miles of single phase to get around this slide area.

Cottonwood Creek, south of Lewistown, has washed out one single phase pole and a guy wire on another pole. South of Ryegate, in Big Coulee, a three phase pole washed out and our crews had a very difficult time getting into the area to replace it.

Replace or reroute

Later this year, we will have to go

back into most of these areas and replace or reroute the poles and underground wires that have washed out or were in slide areas. The good news is that our crews were able to keep the power on to most residences.

Highwood Generating Station

I am pleased to report that Southern Montana Electric G & T voted to raise the debt ceiling limit from \$150 million to \$300 million. This will enable Southern to continue with Phase 2 of the natural gas generating station. Together, Phase 1 and Phase 2 will produce 120 megawatts of electricity.

I believe this is a good decision. Southern is looking at long term power prices that will benefit the Fergus membership for the next 40 years beginning in 2014.

Rate increase

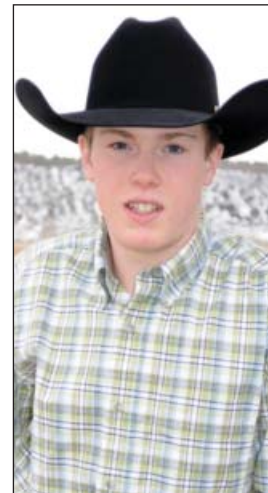
Last month in the Manager's Message, I informed you that I would be recommending to the board that the cooperative implement a rate increase. Since then, the Great Falls school district and Benefis Health System, two members of Electric City Power (ECP), have decided to purchase power from PPL when their contracts with ECP expire on June 30, 2011.

Our power supplier, Southern Montana Electric G & T Cooperative, buys power based on power agreements that included ECP and its customers. Benefis alone represented about 5 megawatts of power. The stranded cost left by ECP's customer loss affects the rates Southern is forced to charge its members. In June, Southern implemented a rate increase.

During the June 30 board meeting, the Fergus Board voted to implement an overall, average rate increase of 6.48 percent. The rate increase will be for July's electric usage, which will reflect on the electric billing statement that you receive on August 1, 2011. Please visit our website at www.fergus-electric.coop for the new electric rates.

The staff and board continue to examine expenses and reduce costs when it is beneficial. For example, a new pole purchase agreement was signed and it will save \$57 per pole.

Parker Broyles represents Fergus Electric in D.C.



Parker Broyles, a Rapelje High School junior, joined 23 Montana youth visiting the nations' capital, taking in the sights and learning how government works. This was the largest Youth Tour ever with

Parker Broyles

1,554 high school students and 279 chaperones attending the event.

The Youth Tour program is supported by hundreds of the nation's electric co-ops that are committed to building a future generation of co-op leaders.

Parker won the Washington, D.C. trip after writing an essay addressing the following situation:

You are in charge of the energy efficiency program at your school. Describe ways you would recommend for your school to use electricity more efficiently: He wrote: "The school could run more efficiently if there was an alternate supply of electricity. Some choices would be solar panels, wind turbines as well as using less coal."

While Parker had time for museums, monuments and other attractions, he also spent part of the week on Capitol Hill visiting with Montana's congressional delegation. When the youth go back to their communities, they have a better understanding of how rural electrification has helped shape the nation and changed rural America.

Parker is the son of Fergus Electric members Gary and Susan Broyles.

Cream of the West

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flavor as well as great nutritional value.”

Other products include several granola, oatmeal, buttermilk flapjack and seasoned breading mixes, sweet clover honey, huckleberry honey and coffee beans. Customers can even find posters, t-shirts, and a variety of other gift items.

Schools and universities are quickly adding Cream of the West granolas to their salad and yogurt bars. “Kids really like the Montana Crunch trail mix and university students love the seven-grain flapjack mix,” Alicia says. “It’s so easy. Just add water.”

Cream of the West recently expanded their product line to include 100 percent organic whole grain products. Their newest is an organic wheat and rye. They also offer flours, seeds, groats, berries and flakes from a variety of grains, as well as soybeans and buckwheat.

Packages of various grains arrive at the warehouse in gigantic totes weighing 1,500 pounds. Bobby supervises their roasting in the tumbler; then the entire crew pitches in to pack the boxed mixes into cartons. From tote through tumbler to boxes and cartons takes about three days. Then it heads out the loading dock to the markets.

Cream of the West is available in locations throughout Montana and the Rocky Mountain region, particularly in



Besides the two hot cereals that form the staples of Cream of the West, several granola, oatmeal, buttermilk flapjack and seasoned breading mixes are offered. Bobby Lewis oversees the warehouse. He receives shipments, processes and packages the products, and fills orders.

SuperValu (Albertson’s) and Associated Food Stores. 2J’s in Great Falls regularly stocks most of their products, including the organic products, and the company hopes to have more Cream of the West on Lewistown shelves soon. Alicia is looking toward further expansion, especially eastward into the Dakotas and Minnesota and then internationally, possibly the Middle East.

She also wants to aggressively market the organic line. “We want to fill a niche among young affluents who are concerned about where their food comes from,” she explains. “Our challenge is to get the word out.”

Alicia is quick to credit the business networks that are assisting Cream of the West. She appreciates the help they have received from Snowy Mountain



Development Corporation in Lewistown. As the company transitioned between owners and their new location, SMDC provided support in securing grants and advice to get the business started.

“I can’t say enough good things about Kathy Bailey and Bob Giese.” She continues, “Also, people at the Departments of Agriculture, Labor, and Commerce and the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center have been wonderful. It’s so fun learning who’s out there to help and getting to know them. They continue to help us as we open the door to our organic line.”

Cream of the West – a long-standing Montana tradition planning for the next hundred years.

McConnell recognized at national conference

Vangie McConnell, benefits and communications administrator for the cooperative, recently received recognition in the 2011 “Spotlight on Excellence” national awards program sponsored by the Council of Rural Electric Communicators and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

McConnell received Awards of Merit for her Fergus Features newsletter produced monthly



Vangie McConnell

for Fergus Electric Cooperative and for a Christmas card she designed. The newsletter is part of *Rural Montana*, the magazine of the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association. She also received an Award of Mention for her ad titled “Together We Have the Power to Make a Difference.”

Award recipients were honored during the Connect 2011 Conference held in Denver.

Identify account number

Win a \$31.50 credit

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

**Account 344161 • Account 137755
Account 378832**

You will receive a \$31.50 credit on next month’s statement.

Judith Stephenson of Lavina was last month’s winner.

Directors elected at annual meeting

Mike Vlastelic (left) of Grass Range and David Dover of Buffalo were elected to three-year terms as cooperative trustees at Fergus Electric's annual meeting in Lewistown. At the reorganizational meeting, Bob Evans of Geyser was elected as president, David Dover as vice president and Steve Balster of rural Lewistown as secretary/treasurer.



Scholarships awarded at annual meeting

Funding for the six \$600 scholarships awarded in the drawing come from unclaimed capital credits.

Sarah Spear, a home school student from Buffalo, plans to attend the Frontier School of the Bible for their one-year basic bible program, after which, she is considering a degree in livestock production at Montana State University. Jordan Stilson will attend Montana State University and major in agriculture business. Jordan says, "My college education will point me to the exact career I want to pursue."

Nicholas Metcalfe, a graduate of Stanford High School plans to study agriculture business at Montana State

University and eventually work for an agricultural company in the state of Montana. Kendra Taber of Shawmut graduated from Harlowton High School. She will take pre-veterinary medicine classes at MSU-Billings and continue her education at Colorado State University where she will earn her Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

Stacy Olson graduated from Fergus High School and will attend MSU-Northern in Lewistown to pursue a degree in nursing. Walter Wichman, a graduate of Winifred High School, plans to attend MSU-Northern where he will study diesel technology after which, he hopes to find a job working on trucks or heavy machinery.



L to R: Sarah Spear, Stacy Olson, Jordan Stilson, Walter Wichman, Nicholas Metcalfe and Kendra Taber.


Co-op Connections Card coming soon

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives has created Co-op Connections, a member benefit program that offers co-op members products and service discounts at participating retail business. By using the Co-op Connections Card members will be able to receive 10 percent to 60 percent discount on prescription drugs at over 60,000 national and regional pharmacy chain stores as well as local pharmacies.

The Co-op Connections Program is free to all members of participating cooperatives. One card can be used for the entire family. Watch for additional information in future issues of Fergus Features.



Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.
LEWISTOWN, MT

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 

FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call **406-538-3465** day or night or:

Dale Rikala	406-535-5192
Guy Johnson.....	406-535-5132
Scott Sweeney	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)	406-323-3426
Monte Obert	406-425-1288

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