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# A journey on the land

**Gene and Christine Goven**, McLean Electric Cooperative members farm and ranching north near Turtle Lake, were honored by the North Dakota Stockmen's Association, North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts and the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition for their conservation land management practices. The prestigious award is part of a land stewardship program recognizing landowners for their management practices, which benefit agricultural production as well as soil and land health and wildlife.



PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



McLean Electric Cooperative members **Gene** and **Christine Goven** were named the Sand County Foundation 2019 Leopold Conservation Award recipients, honoring them for their conservation practices in their farm and ranch operation. The Govens live north of Turtle Lake.

‘feel’ right,” Gene offered.

Like many producers, he found himself working harder on the land to raise his crops and livestock. Yet working harder didn’t translate into more profitability. “We were holding our own, but not gaining, only maintaining,” he said.

Something needed to change.

He decided to try cross fencing, running cattle in smaller grazing areas for shorter durations. Productivity improved, but he felt it could have been better.

That’s when he enrolled in a holistic management course. It prompted him to take a “big picture” look at his land, his relationship to it, and how its health could translate into better productivity.

It’s been 40 years since Gene installed his first cross fence, shifting his livestock management from season-long grazing to planned grazing. He closely manages the number of cattle – even factoring in weight – with the logistics of where, when and how long the cattle will be in a particular location on his grazing land.

Moving cows from one area to another after a few days or weeks is one component to Gene’s land management strategy.

In addition, he closely monitors his land, working with North Dakota State University Extension Service and university researchers, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources and Conservation Service, and the Mandan-based USDA Agricultural Research Station, as well as learning from

COURTESY PHOTO

## A journey on the land

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**G**ene Goven’s life’s work has been a journey.

It’s a journey he and his wife, Christine, are still on today, even though he bought the land he farms and ranches in 1967.

His journey finds him constantly learning, constantly studying the

land – its plants, its soil and the animals it sustains, which includes livestock and wildlife.

Gene grew up on a farm near Turtle Lake. However, one could say his journey began what may be its most intriguing path sometime in the late 1970s. “Things just didn’t

other producers.

Gene studies how much rain penetrates the soil (rather than running off to create flooding and erosion) and conducts soil and carbon testing, for example. “I’m looking at the soil microbes,” he added.

Gene and Christine’s farm and ranch operation manages soil diversity for soil health, which includes cropland as well as grazing land management. For example, he incorporates companion cropping as well as cover crops and runs livestock on some areas of harvested cropland.

Yes, soil health has improved.

So, too, has the farm’s bottom line. For example, from 1982 through 2010, rangeland forage production increased 400 to 450 percent, translating into increased

per acre livestock weight gain. The philosophy is to feed soil microbes first, Gene described, then the cattle. “Because you can’t raise more (livestock and forage) than the soil can produce,” he shared.

Companion cropping examples include using lentils, which provide a natural fertilizer, benefiting crop and soil alike.

Seeding oats and field peas together also provides multiple benefits. It’s a good cattle forage mix, makes good hay, and provides winter grazing on the field, Gene described. In addition, oats and field pea roots planted together penetrate up to four times deeper into the soil than either seeded alone, which aids in water infiltration and carbon sequestration. Less water runoff reduces flooding and erosion, as well.

Diversity is the core of the Goven farm operation. Also at its core is Gene’s dedication to sharing his experiences – what has and hasn’t worked for his particular operation – and learning from other’s experiences.

Gene was instrumental in starting a grassland management pilot program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It uses cattle as a tool to improve grassland and soil health, while benefiting wildlife on National Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas where wildlife biologists found less wildlife productivity on lands that didn’t incorporate a planned livestock management program.

Even with decades in farming, Gene is still learning and sharing, especially through his involvement

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## **N.D. Grazing Lands Coalition mentors others**

“Example is not another way to teach, it is the only way to teach.”

When Albert Einstein spoke those words, he wasn’t referencing the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition. After all, that philosophy applies to many arenas in life.

But that simple sentence sums up the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition philosophy, mission and approach to finding better ways to manage soil, land, and the livestock and wildlife that depend on it.

Founded in 1996 by a group of farmers and ranchers, the nonprofit organization is a strong advocate for the health and long-term sustainability of grazing land – its soil and its plants.

Grazing land is a broad term for land supporting plants suitable for harvest by grazing animals. It’s done mainly through grazing management techniques and isn’t just native prairie – it’s hayland,

grazed cropland, native prairie and grazed forest, for example.

The heart of the organization is its philosophy of mentorship.

Farmers and ranchers don’t have to “go it alone” when it comes to trying to find ways to better manage their grazing land, cropland and livestock. Turtle Lake producer Gene Goven helped establish the coalition, in part because of his commitment to being willing to learn, share information and exchange ideas.

The organization has mentors eager to share their knowledge of what worked for them, what didn’t work, what they learned, and what they hope to learn. No two farms and ranches are alike, even when they’re neighbors.

They know that because they live that.

However, by learning from other’s experiences, producers

can adapt that knowledge to their operation to help identify what may or may not work for them. Mentorship topics include cropland aftermath grazing, complementary grazing, fencing, grazing management and rotations, grazing management economics, livestock movement, and water development and placement.

Members volunteer their time to visit with producers, interacting and learning from each other. Many have also given presentations across the United States to an array of farm, ranch and conservation organizations, all driven by their passion for learning, sharing, and desire to care for the land and those who depend upon it.

Go to their website, [www.ndglc.com](http://www.ndglc.com), for more information about the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition. ■

## Ag and conservation meld

Yes, agriculture and conservation can work together.

That's part of the philosophy of the Sand County Foundation.

They also believe that for the long-term, sustainable betterment of the environment – and ultimately, people – agriculture and conservation need to work together.

The foundation is named in honor of the 1949 book, "Sand County Almanac," authored by one of America's leading conservationists, Aldo Leopold. It began a landowner partnership in 1967, working with adjacent private landowners to protect the land surrounding Leopold's historic Wisconsin farm.

One of the ways the organization supports agriculture, the land ethic and conservation is through its Leopold Conservation Award, named in his honor.

Coupled with Leopold's strong belief that land ownership carries with it a responsibility for proper land management, his recognition that a farm and ranch's profitability and economic success was tied to conservation, and advancing science to help meld them together, the Sand County Foundation recognizes landowners in 20 states throughout the country with the award. It pays tribute to landowners working to enhance land, water and wildlife resources through their dedication to land and soil health and long-term sustainability.

A wide array of agriculture, energy and conservation organizations, businesses, state and federal agencies and rural electric cooperatives team up to sponsor the award, which was presented to Gene and Christine Goven, Turtle Lake, in 2019. ■

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with the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition as a volunteer mentor. He shares his experiences and knowledge with other producers, while continuing to learn from their experiences.

The couple was honored in the fall of 2019 with the North Dakota Leopold Conservation Award, which was presented by the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts, North Dakota Stockmen's Association and North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition.

The stunning crystal award graces the Goven living room. This

spring when the ground thaws, Gene will put up a large metal sign designating them as award winners in the farmyard, which also serves to recognize his life's work.

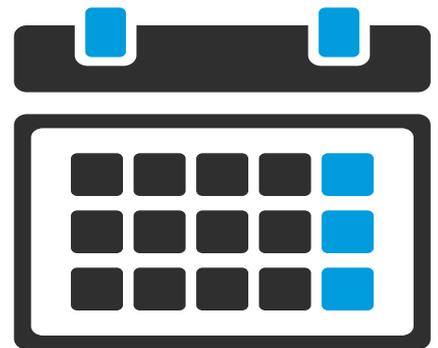
While some of Gene's farming philosophies came from his roots – sage advice from his father and grandfather on using companion crops, for example - the journey of learning continues.

"It's a journey, not a destination. ... It's been a fun journey, challenging. We've met a lot of creative people from all over the United States, the world," he offered. ■

## McLean County community calendar:

# Events and activities to see and do

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



### McLean County food pantries:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. Feb. 6; 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 15; and 4-6 p.m. March 5, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Feb. 17, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** 2-4 p.m. Feb. 13; 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 22, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full distribution 4-6 p.m. Feb. 20, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

### February events:

- **Feb. 1: Snowshoe Lacing Class,** Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison, 9 a.m. Call 701-337-5576 for information and registration.

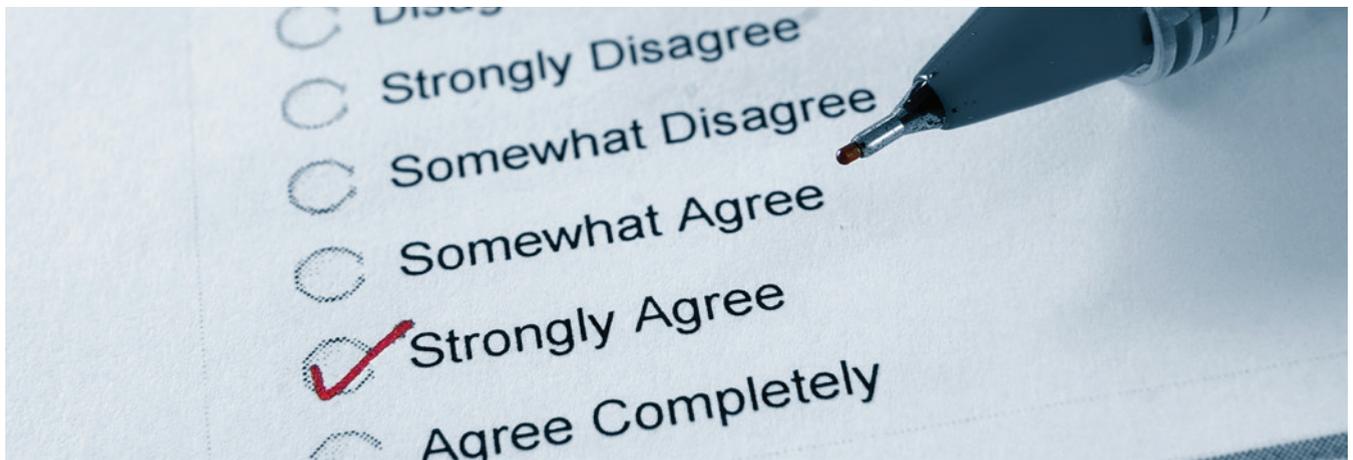
- **Feb. 5: McLean County Ag Show,** 9 a.m., Garrison High School, Garrison.

- **Feb. 8: Full Snow Moon Candlelight Hike,** Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison, 6 p.m. Weather-permitting, hike, cross-country ski or snowshoe the trail lit with candle luminaries, with snacks and refreshments at the Visitor Center.

- **Feb. 15: Garrison Fire Department Annual Buffalo Feed & Dance,** Garrison City Auditorium, 4:30-6:30 p.m. with dance to follow.

- **Feb. 15: Wilton Fire Department fundraiser,** including corn hole competition. ■

*McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill by emailing [stockdill.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:stockdill.patricia@gmail.com), or calling 701-337-5462, to submit listings.*



## GETTING TO KNOW YOU:

### Basin Electric Power Cooperative consumer survey helps understand electric consumers' energy needs

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

As one of the largest electric generation and transmission cooperatives in the United States, it isn't feasible for Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) strategic planners to sit and visit with all of its members.

It's not that they wouldn't like to get to know them better, it's just that BEPC provides electricity to distribution cooperatives – including McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) - across parts of nine states in rural America.

The next best thing is for BEPC to collaborate with its distribution cooperatives to survey members about their electric usage.

The results help both Basin Electric and McLean Electric plan for their future. They use the information in their long-range strategic planning to help guide decision-making and ensure electrical demands can be met now and in the future.

"We want to know what the residential user looks like," described

Jay Lundstrom, BEPC survey coordinator.

Survey results help answer questions about if and how consumers are changing their electric usage, how they use electricity, or identify ways they are and are not becoming more energy-efficient, for example.

Surveys were mailed to random MEC members in November 2019. Lundstrom said they plan to have summaries for each distribution cooperative available in the spring of 2020, as well as analyze data from a regional generation and transmission perspective.

Basin Electric typically conducts the survey every four to six years, Lundstrom described. With decades of data, it helps determine trends, which is important to help identify long-term needs.

North Dakota's most notable electric use trends typically mirror national trends. "Our members are using more heat pumps, ground-source heat pumps," Lundstrom

explained. Air conditioning is becoming more commonplace, especially as it's incorporated into new home construction plans with heating and cooling systems, televisions are larger, and people are becoming more energy-efficient.

MEC also participates in an annual telephone survey conducted by the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives. Both surveys provide valuable information, MEC General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl described. "Any data we can get will help us in the planning we do. It's trying to plan to make sure we have the (needed) power quality."

Thank you to MEC members who mailed or submitted their 2019 residential energy use survey online, as well as taking a few minutes to answer questions if they received a phone survey about their rural electric cooperative.

It's that type of member involvement that helps McLean Electric continue to best serve its members. ■

# Operation Round Up continues to grow

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



**M**cLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) members contributed more than \$96,000 in less than eight years, helping neighbors and friends in need through Operation Round Up.

The program rounds up MEC members' electric bill to the nearest dollar. The most an account can contribute in any billing cycle is 99 cents – less than \$12 a year at the most. Yet those pennies have helped people throughout MEC's service area since December 2012 when the first grants were awarded.

Operation Round Up grants support charitable, education, scientific, health and safety programs and projects within MEC's service area. In addition, grants assist families or individuals in need of financial assistance in emergency or medical situations.

Grants awarded in May 2019 totaled \$12,000. Funds provided financial support for libraries, AED equipment for area ambulance service, food banks, and community center, for example.

October 2019 grants totaled \$10,550 and include:

- Garrison Area Resource

Center & Food Pantry: \$2,500 to establish a Garrison-based food pantry.

- Marketplace of Ideas/ Marketplace for Kids Inc., \$500 for innovative educational programs.
- Max Community Library, \$800 for new shelving and other improvements.
- Mercer Community Center, \$1,000 for facility improvements.
- North Dakota 4-H Foundation Inc., \$2,000 for electrical service to camper pads at the Washburn 4-H Camp.
- Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max, \$2,000 to purchase supplies.
- St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Butte, \$2,500 to assist Darvis and Shelly Arndt, who lost their home and possessions to a fire in 2019.
- Turtle Lake Chamber of Progress, \$500 to purchase gifts/toys for Santa Store event.

MEC members generate approximately \$1,100 each month

for Operation Round Up grants, MEC Operation Round Up Advisor Sonja Moe described.

Typically, qualifying grant requests receive funding, described MEC General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl. Should a time come when the number of requests exceeds available funds, the volunteer Operation Round Up board of directors will prioritize grant awards based on the immediacy of need and emergency, such as house fire or sudden medical emergency, Dahl suggested.

While Operation Round Up is a program sponsored by many electric cooperatives across the United States; the cooperatives – including MEC – serve only in an advisory capacity and help facilitate grant distributions. Operation Round Up board members are volunteers who also serve in MEC's volunteer advisory board.

Each of MEC's seven board members nominates three people to represent their district on its MEC



**Raymond Iverson**, director of Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry in Max, stands by the freezer that was purchased with Operation Round up funds.



**Kelly Voth**, director of the Turtle Lake Library, receives a check from Operation Round Up board member, **Deborah Boe**.

advisory board. Operation Round Up directors are chosen from that pool of volunteers.

The heart of the program is the generous heart of MEC members who round up their monthly electric bills. “It’s members helping members, it’s a great program,” Dahl exclaimed.

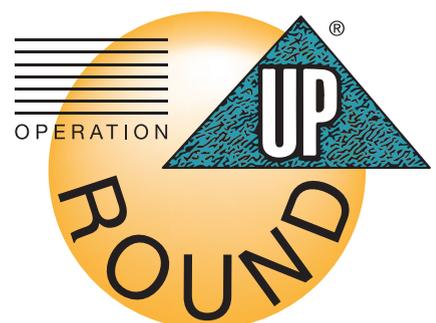
Moe encourages nonprofit organizations to apply for Operation Round Up grants. Nonprofit

organizations such as a church can submit grant applications on behalf of individuals in need.

Applications for the next grant round are due April 30. The Operation Round Up board meets May 5 to award grants.

More information and an application are available on the MEC website, ([www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com)), clicking “Community” on the home page, and then clicking “Operation

Round Up” or call Sonja Moe at McLean Electric office 463-6700. ■



# Basin Electric & McLean Electric offer scholarships

Thinking about going to college and wondering how you will pay for everything? Basin Electric Power Cooperative will be offering two scholarships in the amount of \$500 each. McLean Electric will offer one \$500 scholarship.

Applicants must be members of McLean Electric or children of members of the cooperative. The applicant must be a student who is enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

Information packets are available at area schools. Contact your school superintendent. You can also obtain information by calling 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922. Packets are also available at our office located along Highway 37. Stop by during business hours and pick up an information packet or check out [www.mcleanelectric.coop](http://www.mcleanelectric.coop).

All applications must be received in our office by Feb. 26, 2020. The scholarships and financial assistance award will be presented to the recipients at McLean Electric's 75th annual meeting on June 16. ■

## Past Basin Electric scholarship recipients

2015	Gwen Scheresky Myles Odermann
2016	Macy Dimler Bethany Kolschefski
2017	Kimberly Kolden Cassidy Schafer
2018	Ally Behles Hope Scheresky
2019	Ally Behles Joshua Thompson

## Past McLean Electric scholarship recipients

2015	Shane Giedd Sarah Behles
2016	Kylee Reiser
2017	Cassidy Huesers
2018	Brooke Goven
2019	Hannah Retterath

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**Larry Gessele**, president  
701-447-2461  
District 7, Mercer

**Darcy Klain**, vice president  
701-448-2408  
District 4, Ruso

**Rod Stockdill**, secretary-treasurer  
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District 3, Garrison

**Clarence Behles**, asst. secretary-treasurer  
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District 2, Garrison

**Troy Presser**, director  
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**Karen Hanson**, director  
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District 6, Washburn

**James Odermann**, director  
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