

# Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## SOMERSET REC

223 Industrial Park Road  
Somerset, PA 15501  
814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

Email: e-mail@somersetrec.com  
Website: www.somersetrec.com

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**General Manager**

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*Manager of Outside Operations*

**Emily Baer**

*Director of Marketing and Member Services*

**Phil Stern**

*Manager of Technical Services*

**Jessi Ditzler**

*Executive Assistant*

## OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday  
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

## A Winter to Remember



**RUSTON OGBURN**

**DESPITE THE PROTESTS OF MANY** friends and family, I still enjoy — along with our sled-riding kids — a long, cold winter. This year's combination of snow and lengthy stretches of temperatures in the teens was a good reminder that winter can come to our area with a vengeance.

Freezing temperatures often slow down many of the things that cause power outages and disruptions. With leaves off trees and the roots firmly frozen, we see far fewer tree-related outages during these cold stretches. Additionally, most birds and animals decrease the activity that can cause blinks or power disruptions. On the other hand, winter wind, heavy snow, and ice create their own issues for weakened trees outside of our right of way and can lead to hazardous driving conditions and more damaged poles along our roads.

As you know, winter often creates the worst possible working conditions for lineworkers trying to restore your power. These conditions, from December through February, were some of the toughest in my memory. Despite all of this, our crews did not hesitate to respond and worked long hours during several stretches of terrible weather.

We've found that the best way for us to avoid working in these conditions — and ensure your lights stay on during these brutal times — is the ongoing line maintenance the cooperative has prioritized. Our right-of-way clearing cycle has decreased to about six years, with lines being reviewed mid-cycle so we can remove any hazardous trees or conditions that may have arisen since the work was last completed.

Pole inspections and the replacement of aging wire and insulators have kept our construction crews focused on a proactive strategy that helps the cooperative avoid long outages when bad weather arrives. Additionally, our new metering infrastructure is helping us visualize blinks from faulty equipment. We do not often see blinks in wintery conditions, but as the snow turns to rain, we expect to see a resurgence.

As spring returns, hopefully this change is something we can all appreciate while embracing sled riding with the kids, followed by hot chocolate, as a warm memory. If you have any questions about the cooperative or how we strive to be proactive in maintaining your electric service throughout the four seasons, please call or stop by the office. 📞

## RUSTON OGBURN

GENERAL MANAGER

# Members in the Meadows

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

IN 2020, CREATIVE CO-OP MEMBER and flower-inspired artist Mallory Sechler was longing for something to occupy her hands and mind during the pandemic.

Eager to begin a hobby, she randomly chose to start zinnia and cosmos seeds indoors on her windowsill. Having never grown anything in her life, she had no clue what she was doing but fell in love with the process, which motivated her to learn more about flower farming.

Over the next year, encouraged by her humble beginnings, she convinced herself and her husband, Josh, to start a flower farm, Salt + Light Meadows in Confluence, which was inspired by Matthew 5:13-16 — “For we are salt + light.”

“That first year we planted thousands of sunflowers with nothing more than a hoe and our hands,” Mallory

says. “When they bloomed, much to our surprise, people came from all over to take pictures in our field and pick their own flowers.

“I saw quickly people wanted more than flowers; they wanted the experience of being in the flowers and cutting their own. So, in 2022, we transitioned from simply growing flowers [to] growing flowers for people to pick themselves along with flower-themed events like paint nights, pressed-flower art, and so much more.”

## Locally grown

As the saying goes, it hasn't been all sunshine and roses, however. One of the biggest challenges the couple has faced is the unpredictable Somerset County weather.

Bulbs and flowers need the perfect weather recipe to grow: a little rain, a lot of sun, cooperative soil temperatures and pH, and more. Weather is a gamble, and the pair is fully reliant on Mother Nature to determine the success of their flower crop. Another challenge is critters. The Sechlers have built fences and are focused on growing flowers that critters don't desire in the areas that are not fenced in.

“The weather can be a challenge,” says Josh, who also serves on the cooperative's board of directors, “but we pride ourselves in growing nearly every flower we sell. However, we do source some flowers in our off season from a local wholesaler to fulfill special orders. About 90% of the flowers that leave our farm were hand grown by us.”

What is the couple's favorite flower, you may ask? Tulips, with peonies close behind. “We love their ease of storing and their long vase life, making them our favorites to pass on to our customers,” Mallory explains.

When it comes to customers' most requested flowers, tulips and peonies also top that list, with dahlias a close second. The Sechlers sell bouquets at local farmers markets, through flower subscriptions, at pop-up events at local businesses, and through special-order farm pickups.

They do their best to avoid waste, but when working with a perishable item, it's inevitable. Flowers are harvested at their peak for optimal vase life, and the couple try their best to get flowers to customers the very same day. Some flowers that store well, like tulips and peonies, are placed in coolers and shared with customers as soon as possible.

## Spreading the joy of flowers

Salt + Light Meadows is also focused on supporting the community by hosting unique flower-themed workshops and events. In the future, the Sechlers hope to be able to provide flowers for weddings and other large events as their farm grows. Through its subscription service, the

SARA SYMONS PHOTOGRAPHY

**WE ARE SALT + LIGHT:** Josh and Mallory Sechler, owners of Salt + Light Meadows, pose with their daughter and ray of sunshine, Audia, in rows of zinnias.



farm's flowers can currently be found in homes across five counties and two states.

For creative cooperative members, the couple's flower-themed workshops and events are a great opportunity to join the Sechlers on their farm. This spring, they are hosting a seed-starting class along with a Mama + Me pressed-flower handprint class to celebrate moms and their little ones.

The Mama + Me class was inspired by Josh and Mallory's 5½-year-old daughter, Audia, who is the "light" of Salt + Light Meadows because she lights up every space she enters with her radiant smile and energetic personality. She is a genuine ray of sunshine, and on the farm, Audia is known as the true boss. She's also a "fancy farmer," who loves dresses and bows, but isn't afraid to get dirty.

Throughout the summer, the Sechlers will be hosting a variety of other events, too, including painting and pressed-flower art nights, candle-making, sourdough-making, pastry-decorating and butterfly-wing making classes, hat bars and permanent jewelry sessions.

"Our butterfly-wing event for littles is our most popular event, and we are sure to offer it multiple times a year," Mallory says. "Many of our events are partnered with other local, small businesses, and each event ends with guests cutting their own bouquet of flowers from our fields.

"Bringing our community together is the heart of our farm," she adds. "The flowers are amazing, but the connections we have made and the friendships that have blossomed have been the best part."

Another unique service at the farm is bouquet preservation. Mallory will press and dry your most cherished flowers — from bridal bouquets to funeral flowers — and frame them for you to enjoy forever. The couple also offers framed floral art with pressed and dried flowers grown on their farm. These are available upon request and at many of their pop-up events.

## Growing with the flow

When asked how to become a successful flower farm owner, the Sechlers' response was humble and inspiring.

"Our biggest lesson has been that failure will teach you far more than success ever will," Josh says. "We've failed more times than we care to admit, but it's been through those failures that we've found our way forward.

"Each year is a totally new adventure with new lessons and opportunities for growth, and we've learned to simply adapt and grow with the flow."

Currently, their goals include building a greenhouse to serve as their events center, which will allow them to host events in every season. They also dream of high tunnels and hoop houses to extend their growing season. One day, the pair hopes to shift to year-round florist work so

SARA SYMONS PHOTOGRAPHY



**AT THE MEADOWS:** From beautiful home-grown flowers and creative learning experiences to a peaceful place to soak up nature, Salt + Light Meadows in Confluence is a welcoming spot to spend time with friends and family.

they can service large-scale events and provide year-round offerings.

Whatever the future holds, the couple prays it includes their community and that it serves as a source for good and God's glory.

"We hope to be the salt and light in our community and beyond ... to enhance the lives of others through our gifts and talents and to spread a contagious light into the lives of everyone we meet," Mallory says.

"Our prayer is that on our land and through our flowers you will encounter God's wondrous creation and be reminded of His good + beautiful gifts. We hope our visitors feel at home with us here at the Meadows." 🌸

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With Mother's Day on the horizon, consider treating mom to a flower-pressing class at the farm or a fresh-cut floral arrangement, available at an upcoming farmers market. You can find out more about these events and admire the beauty of the Sechlers' vibrant flowers by following Salt + Light Meadows on Instagram and Facebook.

