

# Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## SOMERSET REC

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## OFFICE HOURS

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

## EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

## Thank Your Lineworkers



**IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE** all want the convenience of modern living. Step back in time to 1940, when cooperative lines in Somerset County were first energized, bringing light into homes, farms and businesses. The evolution of electricity is incredible in the advancement of technology of TVs, refrigerators, computers, electronics and powered machinery.

Before rural electrification and lineworker careers existed, many homes had oil lamps in place of lightbulbs, buckets of water pumped from a spring in place of a kitchen faucet, and an icebox in place of electric refrigeration. An “icebox” was usually made of wood that was lined with tin or zinc and packed with straw, sawdust, cork, or seaweed for insulation. The box contained a large block of ice to keep perishable food from spoiling, and the drip pan had to be changed daily. It’s incredible how rural electrification has made our lives easier.

On April 10, 2023, the co-op would like to recognize our linemen here at Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) in honor of Lineworker Appreciation Day. Linemen are the unsung heroes, who put their lives at risk every day to make our lives better. For 84 years, these men have kept the lights on, water in the kitchen faucet and cold milk in the refrigerator. They restore your power after a damaging thunderstorm or snowstorm, on sunny, hot July days, and during unforeseen events by Mother Nature. Let’s not forget the unfortunate motor vehicle accidents near power lines, equipment failures, and wildlife interference that result in utility poles and power lines getting knocked off-line and causing power outages. Whatever the situation may be, our linemen have one of the most dangerous jobs in our community.

Everything that comes with being a lineman makes it more than a career: It’s a lifestyle. Lineworkers put their mark on the world one electric pole at a time, so it requires a certain amount of pride to ensure each project lives up to their personal expectations of excellence. Their job does not allow for error or miscommunication, so it is critical for lineworkers to be able to dedicate the time and energy needed to do the job right every time.

Emergencies and severe weather can call lineworkers into work unexpectedly. They miss holidays, family gatherings and birthday celebrations to keep the power on in our homes and businesses.

Keeping the linemen safe is a top priority at Somerset REC. Proper safety measures, such as rubber and leather gloves, hard hats, protective harnesses, flame-resistant clothing, safety chainsaw chaps and more, are used to protect our linemen each time they step on the job. Our linemen also work through all hours of the day and night, in sometimes unsafe environments and inclement weather.

When everyone at the cooperative is committed to the same purpose, we work together to provide safe and reliable electric to the members we serve. So, if you happen to see our crews working near your home or business, take a moment to tell them thanks for keeping the lights on. 🙏

**MINDY HUZSEK**  
OFFICE ASSISTANT



## Physical Therapist Enjoys Garlic Farming

**EMILY BAER**, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

**AS A FULL-TIME PHYSICAL THERAPIST**, Rockwood Area School District board member, coach, and father, somehow co-op member Tyler Pritts has time to grow and produce garlic products for his business, Covered Bridge Garlic Co.

Ten years ago, Tyler started with a small garden, where he grew a variety of produce. He sold it at a roadside stand at his home and used a cash-box honor system for payments. Today's much-larger garden produces a variety of items enjoyed and supported by the community.

Three years into gardening, Tyler noticed garlic really thrived in the soil. He recalls when purchasing the property there were three large garlic patches in the front yard. At the time, he wasn't even sure what it was and pulled it out. He then realized it was garlic, which continued to grow back each year.

Garlic is unique. Each clove turns into its own head the following year. Some garlic can have 14 cloves in a head, and it propagates very quickly. Tyler now plants the largest

cloves to get the largest heads; however, when he first started, he would plant every little clove he could get.

Garlic is planted in October and harvested in July, leaving it underground all winter. The first time he planted garlic in large quantities, Tyler used a straw covering.

"Mistakes were made, and lessons learned and lots of weeds popped up in the straw covering," he says. "A lot of hand weeding took place for the nearly 3,000 heads of garlic harvested our first year. After that, I wanted to seriously investigate plastic covering."

With his home garden at nearly 8,000 square feet, Tyler didn't want to spend all of his time weeding, so he knew he had to implement the lessons he learned.

About two years ago, Tyler started planting the garlic in plastic. He also purchased a yard roller with spikes set 6 inches apart that he rolls on top of the plastic to keep the weeds down. He installed a drip tape down each row, like a soaker hose, to automatically water the garlic. When enough pressure forms, it fills up with water and releases moisture every couple of inches. Tyler also has a fertilizer injector in the line to control the amount of nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, in the soil.

"A lot of chemistry is involved, and I'm glad I had organic chemistry in college," he says. "I never thought the knowledge needed to grow garlic would come from studying to be a physical therapist."

When planting garlic, it's best to use an elevated bed that has dry soil, which consists of sandy grit and a lot of organic matter and is fertilized with chicken manure. Garlic loves nitrogen and sulfur and is a member of the onion family. It is classified in the same category as onions, leeks, chive and shallots.

Currently, Tyler uses a field near Scullton that's owned by his cousin and cooperative member, Mark Temple, to grow his crop. Approximately 20,000 heads of garlic are planted by hand there.

"It's all handwork," he explains. "We plant by hand, harvest by hand, weed by hand and trim by hand."

There are not a lot of garlic farms around. What makes Covered Bridge Garlic Co. unique is that it grows 48 kinds of garlic. Through research, Tyler has found more than 500 different varieties. When

choosing what variety to plant, Tyler considers the sugar content, level of spiciness, how large the heads get, how



**GARLIC PRODUCTS:** Tyler Pritts and his wife, Tara, proudly display their locally sourced fresh garlic and garlic products.



**GARLIC PEPPER JELLY:** This jelly is one of the most popular products Covered Bridge Garlic Co. sells at festivals. Enjoy it on bagels or with cheese and crackers. Also, try the fan favorite: Dip your chicken nuggets in it.



**GARLIC FARM:** More than 20,000 heads of garlic are hand-planted by co-op member Tyler Pritts, his family and friends. The tall stalks, or scapes, can be eaten fresh or pickled and canned.

many cloves per head, and what region of the world the variety is grown.

Garlic is often categorized into softneck and hardneck varieties. garlic stalks have leaves rather than a central stalk. Hardneck garlic has a solid stalk that grows into a curlicue stalk, or scape, that is trimmed off. This trimming refocuses the energy on bulb development, he says, and the top can later be eaten fresh or be pickled and canned.

When purchasing garlic, it's important to look for domestic garlic, Tyler says.

Most garlic at chain supermarkets is not domestic and does not contain roots. The bottom of an imported head of garlic looks like a round, white disc. It is illegal to import soil from foreign countries, so the roots are trimmed flush to the bottom of the garlic head. Also, a lot of imported garlic is injected with water to plump it up to look full and then cured for six weeks before its arrival in grocery stores. So the next time you need fresh garlic for a recipe, consider domestic garlic that is potent, contains roots and is natural.

Covered Bridge Garlic Co. participates in many community events. These include Pumpkinfest in Confluence, the Farmers and Thresherman Jubilee in New Centerville, the Somerset County Fair, and the Rockwood Farmers Market. Tyler is looking forward to attending the Maple Festival in Meyersdale with Matt Pletcher, a cooperative member who owns the Hillside Sugar Shack, a maple syrup camp in Scullton. Tyler and Matt are cooperatively working together to create a maple garlic product that can be paired with most meats, while also adding a sweet and savory kick. Yum!

Products produced by Covered Bridge Garlic Co. include garlic salt and garlic pepper, in which every peppercorn is ground by Tyler or his father with a family heirloom hand-crank grain mill. Other products include garlic powder, minced garlic, smoked paprika garlic rub and garlic pepper

jelly. Seed garlic is also available for purchase for those who have an interest in planting their own garlic patch.

"I've been really blessed to have a lot of people come up to me at festivals and say, 'I'm so glad you're here. We put your products on almost everything we eat,'" he says. "And that's the best validation: to have so many repeat customers."

Covered Bridge Garlic Co. products are labeled as PA Preferred, a program established in 2004 by the state Department of Agriculture to identify and promote food and agricultural products grown, produced, and processed in Pennsylvania.

Tyler is sincerely thankful for his wife, children, parents and extended family members who have supported his garlic journey by lending a hand at harvest or manning the table at events. He reiterates the pride he has in his business. Not many people, he says, can say they can grow, make and sell their products without a middle man. The garlic products from Covered Bridge Garlic Co. are produced locally every step of the way.

"It's been nice because I really enjoy growing and producing the products from start to finish. The reception has been great, and the community has been incredibly supportive, and we are very grateful for that," Tyler says. "I'd love to see where this opportunity takes me. It's all handwork and honest work, and there are some nights I'm in the field with a headlamp until 11 p.m., sitting in the mud on my hands and knees, but it's really humbling."

Visit Covered Bridge Garlic Co. at upcoming festivals and stop by for a sample of its locally sourced garlic products. Personally, my favorite is the garlic pepper jelly, and I'm looking forward to trying the maple garlic pepper rub, too. 🍷



**EXPLODING HOT DOG:** Fourth grade students at Berlin Brothersvalley Elementary School enjoy the Electric City presentation given by Rus Ogburn, Somerset REC general manager, and Emily Baer, director of marketing and member services, in March. The pair visit classrooms across Somerset REC's service territory to teach children basic electric information, where electricity comes from and how to stay safe around power lines. So far this school year, Electric City has been presented to more than 200 students.

# Join us for the 84th Annual Meeting!



## In Person at the Somerset Area High School Auditorium

645 S Columbia Ave., Somerset | May 25, 2023

Registration begins at 5 p.m. | Business Meeting starts at 6 p.m.

\$20 electric bill credit and basket raffle entry for all registered members!