

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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Guest Column



Watch that wire!

By Pete Yastishock, *Director of Safety & Compliance*

IMAGINE this scenario: The weather is nice, and you are taking a walk and the kids are riding their bikes. You come around a curve and see that a tree has pulled a wire from the pole and onto the ground. The line is just lying there. You do not see any sparking, arcing or flames, or hear any noise coming from the downed line. So what do you do? We'll get to that in a minute.

The power of electricity is a wonder, and when it is controlled, it is one of the safest forms of energy. However, when electricity is uncontrolled, like when a wire is on the ground or hanging low near the ground, it presents a very dangerous situation. And just because a line is not sparking, arcing or making a sound, or just because your power is out, does not mean that wire is safe.

No lineman can tell if a line is live just by looking at it, and neither can you. Fatal accidents have occurred because people assumed a downed wire was not energized — which is absolutely not always the case.

That is why we continually stress the need to treat every wire like it is energized.

So back to our scenario. What do you do when you encounter a seemingly harmless wire lying on the ground?

Keep people and pets away, at least 30 feet from the wire. Protect the area. Do not let cars drive across the wire.

Watch for other conductive hazards, such as fences, that could carry the electricity farther than 30 feet.

Whatever caused the wire to come down may have also damaged other equipment. Whatever brought the wire

down could also make other parts of the electrical system come down. So don't stand under other wires or near poles that are still up — keep back at least 30 feet in case one of them falls.

Call the electric utility immediately and report the downed wire. If the wire is across a roadway or on houses or vehicles, also call 911 to report the hazard.

Do not ever think you can use a board, branch or broom stick to move a wire. At higher voltages, wood or fiberglass sticks can conduct electricity. And walking up to a downed wire can cause the hazard of "difference of ground potential" by electricity radiating through the ground.

If a wire has fallen onto your car do not exit the vehicle. Have someone call 911, remain in the vehicle, and keep others away. If you absolutely must leave the vehicle, (for instance, if it is on fire) do not touch the vehicle and the ground at the same time. Jump clear of the vehicle and land with your feet together. Shuffle, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times, to get away from the area.

Never attempt to cut a tree that is resting on wires or hung up on a pole. Electricity can come down the tree, or the equipment can break and bring both the tree and energized equipment down.

We encourage you to talk to others about the actions to take when someone encounters a downed wire. Talk to your children. Talk to those around the farm, at work, or at your hunting club. Being prepared for the unexpected hazards of downed wires can save a life. 

A fresh approach for 150-year-old farm

By Jeff Fetzer

EARLY on in his quest for a degree in geography, Ben LaRue knew where he wanted to be after graduating, and it had nothing to do with his chosen field of study.

It had everything to do with the fertile fields on his father's farm in Susquehanna County.

The Elk Lake High School grad had completed his second year at Bloomsburg University in 2000 when he decided his calling was similar to that of the six generations that preceded him on the LaRue family farm.

But unlike his predecessors who had focused on livestock, primarily dairy cows, since the farm was founded in 1868, Ben wanted to make a go of growing produce.

His interest in vegetable farming took root the summer after his sophomore year of college. The family garden had produced a surplus of vegetables that year, and Ben decided to try to sell the excess by placing them on a picnic table at his grandmother's farmhouse along State Route 706 just east of Rush.

"We had a few extra quarts of tomatoes, so I put them on the picnic table, and they were gone in no time," he recalls. "I knew right then that I wanted to sell produce."

The summer of 2001, Ben married his high school sweetheart, Renee, following her graduation from Bloomsburg University, where she majored in elementary education. After Ben completed his degree work the following year, the couple returned to Susquehanna County, initially living with Renee's parents, and then moving onto the 700-acre farmstead of Ben's parents, Claverack members Dennis and Victoria LaRue, in the late fall of 2002.

A year later, 2003, Ben and Renee officially started their produce business, LaRue's Farm Market. That spring, Ben planted a variety of vegetables on the fertile flat next to Wyalusing Creek, just across the road from his grandmother, Mildred. Next to the

farmhouse, Ben and Renee's home since Mildred's passing in 2008, Renee operated a tiny produce stand.

"The beginning was a struggle," Renee recalls. "I was a young mom, and Ben was working from sunup to sundown. Sometimes it might be an hour or two between customers. Those were pretty lean years."

About the time Ben and Renee were working to ramp up their farm market business, the Buy Fresh Buy Local program, which promotes the purchase of locally grown produce, was gaining traction in Pennsylvania.

With increased public awareness and a growing market for local produce, the business flourished.

Today, Ben grows produce on 20 acres, primarily on his father's property straddling Route 706 in Rush Township. Renee's small produce stand has been replaced by a spacious retail farm market building, complete with a small office, ample space for the fresh produce and canned goods, and a display freezer stocked with meats from the all-natural black Angus beef cows and hogs that Ben's father raises on the farm. The retail store also carries eggs from Ben and Renee's 300 laying hens, as well as fresh fruits grown at farms and orchards in the region, locally produced honey, maple syrup, jams and jellies, as well as a wide variety of flowers.



HIGH STAKES: Ben LaRue of Rush explains the "Florida weave" method of staking tomato plants, which utilizes string woven around a series of wooden stakes to keep the plants upright. LaRue plants about 3,000 tomato plants each year, some outdoors, above, and some in high tunnels, below. All of the tomato plants are started from seed in the LaRue's Farm greenhouse.



"When we first started, I was just amazed that somebody would stop and pick up produce here," Ben says, noting the farm market is a bit removed from the proverbial beaten path. "It's very humbling to know how many people have come and supported us over the years."

On a busy day, especially Fridays and Saturdays when sweet corn and tomatoes are in season, Renee says as many as 150 customers will make purchases from the store.

The store opens the first week of May and closes in November. It operates Monday through Saturday, with "honor system" purchases of sweet corn available on Sundays.

Ben attributes the success of the

farm market to the freshness and quality of the produce he raises. All of the vegetables sold at the market are grown on the property and picked fresh daily. Most vegetables are started from seed in a greenhouse next to Ben and Renee's home. Cucumbers, peppers and many of the tomatoes are transplanted in two 300-foot-long high tunnels, or hoop houses. With the exception of the sweet corn, pumpkins and potatoes, the nearly two dozen types of vegetables raised on the farm are grown in the natural soil using black plastic mulch with drip irrigation.

"Green peppers are the first things that are seeded in the greenhouse, starting in February," Ben says. "We have about 100 different seeding dates, and everything is staggered so that you have a fresh and steady supply of produce from the time the market opens in May to when we close for the season in the fall."

Ben keeps meticulous records of seed starting dates, transplant dates, and harvest yields and spends the winter



FARM FAMILY: Ben and Renee LaRue stand with their three girls, Madison, far left, Hannah, front, and Payton, far right. The 150-year-old LaRue farmstead where the market operates is owned by Ben's parents, Claverack members Dennis and Victoria LaRue.



MAKING A STAND: LaRue's Farm Market owners Ben and Renee LaRue display some of the early season produce, cucumbers and summer squash, offered in their retail store along State Route 706 in Rush Township, Susquehanna County. In addition to direct sales from the store, the LaRues also sell produce to one area grocer and operate a stand at the Farmers Market in Binghamton, N.Y., every Saturday.

months researching ways to improve his operation.

"I'm a first-generation produce farmer," he says. "I am always willing to change and to try something new."

Last year, for instance, he began growing cucumbers on strings in the high tunnel, which he said greatly improved the quality and yield of his cucumber crop. He also began concentrating heavily on soil health and its relationship to total plant nutrition in order to reduce the use of conventional sprays. He enhances the soil with organic soil supplements and plants cover crops during the off season and when the ground is not in vegetable production to help with soil fertility.

The perennial top seller at LaRue's Farm Market is sweet corn. Ben begins sowing corn in mid-April, using fabric row covers to protect the young plants from early frosts. Sweet corn is typically available at the market July 10 through late October.

Ben picks the sweet corn daily and will start each morning of the harvest season by collecting about 40 dozen ears. On days he anticipates heavy sales, or if the corn sells out quickly, he'll return to the cornfield and pick

another batch.

"It's all about picking it ripe for the customer — young and tender," he says. "Corn is picked fresh each morning after the sun hits it. I'm very fussy. If it starts to get too big, I don't pick it."

During the peak harvest season, corn isn't the only thing he's picking. In July, for instance, he's harvesting tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, summer squash, beans, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, garlic and potatoes. All of the harvesting is done by hand.

If it sounds like a lot of work, it is. Ben says he typically puts in 12- to 14-hour days, six days a week from May through the end of October.

Sunday is the only day the farm market is not open, giving Ben, Renee and their three daughters the opportunity to attend church services and enjoy a few hours respite before Ben heads back to the patch to harvest produce in preparation for Monday morning sales.

The couple's girls, Payton, Madison, and Hannah, are very active with the farm operation. They help transplant vegetable plants and wash the fresh produce and eggs each morning, and Payton, 15, and Madison, 12, also assist

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A fresh approach

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with sales in the retail store.

“I’ve really grown to love the farm and being a part of it,” says Renee. “I’ve learned what it means to be a help mate, and the girls are learning what it means to be a part of a farm family — to take some of the load so it doesn’t all fall on one person.

“And I get to work with my best friend every day,” she adds, nodding at her husband. “It’s hard, but it’s a good life.”

Ben notes that his chosen career path means that he misses out on some of the warm-weather fun — family picnics, golfing, summer vacations — that most people enjoy. But he has no regrets.

“This was a way I could keep the farm going,” he says. “I enjoy this because I started it myself and I work for myself. It is my schedule and my hours — but I think the hours would be a lot less if I was working for someone else!”

More information about LaRue’s Farm Market can be found on the web at laruesfarm.com or on the store’s Facebook page. 🌞

PAiD program saves time, stamps, late-fee worries

If you are looking for ways to simplify your life, Claverack’s Payment Automatically Drafted (PAiD) program may be for you.

By signing up for Claverack’s automatic bill payment program, you can avoid the hassle of searching for stamps, licking envelopes and worrying about whether your payment arrives on time.

When you participate in the PAiD program, the payment for your electric bill is automatically drafted from your checking or savings account or charged to a credit or debit card each month.

Even if you are out of town, your bill will be paid on time. You’ll never have to worry about paying a late fee again.

Here’s what happens after you sign up:

- ▶ The first automated payment will be made the second billing period after we receive

your completed form. The first month will be a trial run to verify account numbers. No money will be moved.

- ▶ You will continue to receive a monthly bill statement.
- ▶ Your bill statement will alert you to the date that your payment will be automatically withdrawn.

With Claverack’s PAiD program, paying your electric bill is simple. There are no sign-up charges or transaction fees. And you can cancel PAiD at any time by notifying us in writing.

To sign up for PAiD, please complete the online application that can be found on our website, www.claverack.com, by clicking on “Payment Options” under the Your Bill drop-down menu at the top of the homepage. For more information, please call 1-800-326-9799.

Claverack helps members save even more when buying Energy Star appliances

WHEN you purchase an Energy Star-rated appliance, you are conserving energy and saving money on your electric bill.

To encourage members to practice energy conservation and responsible energy use, Claverack is offering rebates of \$50 to \$100 to consumer-members who purchase qualifying Energy Star refrigerators, washers and dryers.

Energy Star certification means products meet energy-efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Energy Star-rated products are expected to help consumers reduce their energy bills, conserve energy and protect the environment.

With Claverack’s new Energy Star rebate program, members not only benefit from energy savings generated

from the appliance itself, they get the added benefit of a direct rebate from the co-op for their purchase. For Energy Star-rated refrigerators, the rebate amount is \$100; for washers or dryers, members will receive a \$50 rebate.

To apply for the rebate through the Claverack Energy Star Rebate Program members must:

- ▶ Purchase an Energy Star-rated refrigerator, washer or dryer in the current calendar year.
- ▶ Complete a rebate form. The form is available by clicking on the “rebate” button on the Claverack home page, www.claverack.com or by calling the office at 1-800-326-9799.
- ▶ Include a receipt or invoice showing

the date and purchase price of the Energy Star items.

- ▶ Include a copy of the Energy Star label from the appliance.
- ▶ Mail all documentation to: Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, Attn: Appliance Rebate Program, 32750 Route 6, Wysox, PA 18854.

Once all documentation is received, a bill credit will be applied to your account. Rebates are available on a first-come, first-served basis. There is a limit of one rebate per appliance

type per member account, and appliances must be installed within Claverack’s service territory.

Please note that funding for rebates is limited and the rebate program is subject to change or being cancelled without notice.

For more information, contact the Claverack member services department at 1-800-326-9799. 🌞

