



# CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

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In a time of rising electricity prices and a shortage of electricity generation, Solar for All is poised to both add needed local generation capacity and ensure affordability for ratepayers. This action by EPA takes away the Center's access to grant funding and means that the Center must suspend work on projects, creating great uncertainty for stakeholders from communities to developers to contractors. | Photo by Kylie Kai

## Center for Rural Affairs statement on Solar for All

By Center staff

**O**n Thursday, Aug. 7, 2025, the Center for Rural Affairs received a formal notice of termination from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its \$62.4 million Solar for All grant.

“Solar for All is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Nebras-

kans to improve energy resilience,” said Brian Depew, the Center’s executive director. “In a time of rising electricity prices and a shortage of electricity generation, Solar for All is poised to both add needed local generation capacity and ensure affordability for ratepayers. This action by EPA takes away our

access to grant funding and means that we must suspend work on projects, creating great uncertainty for stakeholders from communities to developers to contractors.”

Congress funded Solar for All in 2022 as part of the federal Inflation Reduction Act. The EPA

—See Solar for All on page 2

### → Inside this issue

- 2 Editor's note
- 4 Rural Iowa county's experience with wind energy highlighted in case study
- 5 Passion percolates into profession for business owner
- 6 Co-op grocery store creates community stability, new life
- 7 New report examines positive impact of funding boost for producers, conservation in Iowa
- 8 Top 5 grant writing tips for rural leaders

## Farmers market's second season brings in more than 100 vendors

By Liz Stewart

**W**hile small towns and large cities both welcome farmers markets to their communities, not every place has the means or ability to run a market. When Misty Schaecher started a cut-flower business in 2020, she drove 30 minutes to a

neighboring community to sell her blooms because she had no local farmers market.

After a few years, she decided something had to change.

“I told my subscription customers that if I didn’t hear of anyone organizing a (Grand Island, Nebraska) market by March 1, 2024,

—See Farmers market on page 3



## Editor's note

By Rhea Landholm, rheal@cfra.org

Vance McCoy, top center in dark blue shirt, highlights cover crops on his farm near Elsie, Nebraska. The Center featured Vance in an event in late July. Topics of discussion included no-till, cover crops, adaptive multi-paddock grazing, and relay cropping, as well as federal programs available to help cost share certain practices. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

This summer, I told quite a few people in my network that I was on a literal “field trip” to southwestern Nebraska. It was exciting.

Andrew Tonnies and Kalee Olson, Center staff who work on agriculture policy, invited me to join them for a conservation field day featuring Vance McCoy, a farmer in southwestern

Nebraska.

People were eager to attend. I thought I was late when I pulled into the “parking lot” which already had more than a dozen pickups. But, no, I was still about 10 minutes early with even more trucks arriving after me.

Overall, 41 people joined in the event which was a part of our Conservation Mentorship Net-

work. While Vance showcased the practices he uses to prioritize soil health and reduce input costs, attendees were not shy in asking questions about types of cover crops, methods, equipment, and more. I learned a lot from the conversation and from others’ experiences.

You can learn more about the network at [cfra.org/CMN](http://cfra.org/CMN).

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## Solar for All, continued from page 1

awarded a Solar for All grant to the Center after a rigorous multi-stage process. Following the award in May of 2024, the Center worked diligently to implement the grant in Nebraska and meet EPA’s requirements. Center staff engaged with dozens of partners to develop a three-part Solar for All program

including community solar, multifamily affordable housing solar, and single family rooftop. The program is designed to reach rural, urban, and Tribal communities in Nebraska and provide eligible recipients with utility savings.

As of August 2025, the Center was in advanced discussions with

multiple communities and housing developers around the state to deploy more than \$20 million in grant funding for solar projects, with additional projects in earlier stages.

“We expect legal action to be taken to restore access to grant funds,” said Brian.

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## Paper & e-news

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. To receive it online, visit [cfra.org/sign-up](http://cfra.org/sign-up) or email [outreach@cfra.org](mailto:outreach@cfra.org).

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## Farmers market, continued from page 1

that I was going to do it myself,” said Misty. “That is how it started.”

Misty and several others began organizing, and, through their drive and hard work, the Grand Island Area Farmers Market opened in June 2024.

“At first, we were worried about having a large enough group of vendors, but we ended our 2024 season with more than 100 vendors,” she said. “Since last year, we are much more known with the public so our crowds seem to have grown exponentially.”

That growth has helped the market enlist sponsors, including local newspaper and television, billboards, and weekly support from corporations and businesses. The resulting outreach has brought in many new faces. A live music concert series has also drawn a crowd this year.

Misty, who now serves as the executive director, found additional ways to reach the public, one of them being through assistance from the Center for Rural Affairs. Center staff have offered resources to promote the market, including a small stipend to buy supplies for the market, such as flags and signage.

“The Center has given us the opportunity to be more knowledgeable on many topics that are beneficial both to us and our vendors,” Misty said. “Having this partnership has helped us to promote in various ways with the public. It has also allowed us to get food out to food pantries.”

Angelyn Wang, local foods associate with the Center, has provided guidance to Misty and others involved in the market.

“The Grand Island Area Farmers Market is a welcoming community for farmers, craft vendors, food purveyors, as well as for their customers,” said Angelyn. “It’s very evident how much time and passion the coordinators put into the market. The Center was really



Misty Schaecher, executive director, and Alyssa Dethloff, market manager, greet customers to a market this summer. In its second year, the Grand Island Area Farmers Market has more than 100 vendors. | Photo by Kylie Kai

happy to work with the market, assisting with training vendors and managers, as well as sharing information and resources.”

This season, 109 local and regional vendors sell produce, meat, flowers, eggs, jewelry, plants, crocheted items, sourdough, baked goods, soaps, honey, popcorn, woodworking items and crafts, candles, artwork, snacks, vanilla products, fresh milled flour, clothing, pet treats, lavender, and more.

“Grand Island is a pretty large community, and I think entrepreneurs were really looking for a place to try out their ideas and sell their products,” Misty said. “I think the fact that we really support and care about our vendors has encouraged them to apply and take part in the market. We do what we can to show our vendors where the value to them lies in being a part of the market.”

All vendors are welcome, and parents are encouraged to bring their kids to the family-friendly

event. Along with the live music, the market occasionally offers bounce houses, face painting, and more, as well as vendor programming for youth entrepreneurs.

“Grand Island is a very diverse community and we feel it is important for our market to reflect that,” Misty said. “People feel a greater sense of belonging when they come to market and are able to see people that look like them as well as people who are different. The market gives community members a place to go each and every Saturday morning while also giving them access to local food and products.”

And she has big plans for upcoming seasons.

“We have a lot of plans to continue to make food purchases after the market to give to food pantries,” she said. “We also have ideas to involve more local artists. We are excited to see how the market progresses in the coming years.”



Greg Lichty, a farmer in Howard County, Iowa, hosts multiple turbines on his property. Like many farmers, he got started when a local wind turbine developer came to visit him. He had a lot of questions regarding how the project would affect his farming business. He worked with the developer on the placement of the turbines and access roads to better fit his operation. Overall, the turbines have been a major asset to Greg, and he has maintained a good relationship with the local project owner. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

## Rural Iowa county's experience with wind energy highlighted in case study

By Alex Delworth, alexd@cfra.org

**W**ind energy was introduced in Iowa in the early 2000s, and many counties have since benefited from that development, including Howard County.

To study the impact on Howard County, Center for Rural Affairs staff interviewed local leaders, farmers, and county officials about contributions to the broader community since the introduction of wind turbines in 2008.

This spring, the Center published "Direct Impact of Wind Energy Development in Howard County," a case study detailing financial benefits to public services, perspectives of local public officials and leaders, and the experiences of farmers on their operations.

"Many county officials and residents in Iowa are considering updates to zoning standards for

wind energy and working out how to strike a balance that still allows communities to capture the benefits of renewable energy," said Alex Delworth, senior policy associate with the Center for Rural Affairs. "Case studies such as this one provide a clearer picture into what that development has meant for other counties with a history of development."

Howard County hosts around 150 turbines, and in 2024 the turbines provided more than \$2.7 million in tax revenue to the county, or 15% of total revenues. Since 2010, through a special financing method, the county has been able to distribute more than \$24 million worth of funds for bridges, roads, public parks, and conservation projects at no extra cost to county residents.

"These funds have been pivotal in several cases," said Alex. "Ac-

cording to the county engineer, the funds doubled the amount of bridges they were able to complete, and it was the difference between closing some bridges and bonding out others, which would have fallen on residents to pay for."

Local farmers also receive land-lease payments for turbines on their property. According to the Howard County Farm Bureau President, that additional money has been used to reinvest in farming operations.

The case study showcases the wind development from the perspective of the stakeholders most closely associated with the projects in Howard County.

"We hope this can be an example for other counties to look toward as they consider an established Iowa industry," said Alex.

To access and read the case study, visit [cfra.org/publications](http://cfra.org/publications).

# Passion percolates into profession for business owner

By Liz Stewart

Lisa Lawton's love of coffee knows no bounds.

She was born and raised in Scribner, Nebraska, but for many years, she lived in Washington state, the birthplace of Starbucks. There, she was surrounded by coffee shops, but when she moved back home, she had to drive 12 miles to get a latte.

Lisa decided that was unacceptable, and her solution was to open her own coffee shop in Scribner.

Finding the right building became her first priority. Lisa had several ideas and places in mind, and almost bought a spot downtown, but there wouldn't have been enough room for a drive-thru, which she felt was essential for any coffee shop.

Once Lisa found a home for her shop, she had the business up and running in two months.

"Starting my business was probably one of the toughest things I've had to do in my life," she said. "It took a lot of coordination with construction and vendors, and we did a lot of the work ourselves. Also, getting the paperwork/business plan done was a lot, but it's necessary when looking for funding."

Lisa turned to Scribner's economic development director for assistance securing funds if she needed extra help and was referred to the Center for Rural Affairs. With some of her own money and a good plan, she was able to obtain funds split between the Center and another resource.

Center staff helped guide Lisa through the loan process. With the financing she received in November 2023, Lisa was able to open Elkhorn River Coffee Company.

"If you have a good business idea and a well-thought-out plan, the Center will help you," Lisa said. "It has worked out pretty well because they offer other help besides just the funds. They really want to see you succeed, so there



Lisa Lawton worked hard to open Elkhorn River Coffee Co., and put a lot of thought into choosing a name that would stand out and be relatable to people who live in Nebraska. She even designed the logo herself. | Photo by Kylie Kai

is help with marketing, accounting—really, anything, and they will help you find what you need if you ask."

The coffee shop offers freshly roasted espresso, brewed coffee, and cold brew as well as a small breakfast and lunch menu, and locally made pastries.

Finding dependable staff and creating balance in the schedule has been one of Lisa's biggest challenges. While she works full-time almost every day, she has 10 part-time employees who all have different availability to cover shifts.

"We are a small town, and although we have many people who will travel to get our product, we don't have a lot of people who can work the hours that we require," she said. "You are always juggling schedules and you rarely get days off, and planned days off become work days when you have call-outs."

Challenges aside, Lisa enjoys owning her business and becoming reacquainted with her home-

town after being gone for so long.

"I am proud of my creation," she said. "It's neat to see how far it's come, and to see how it's affected my community in a positive way."

She's also diligent in making sure people stay updated on everything Elkhorn River Coffee Company has to offer through social media, radio ads, and more.

"You have to remind people that you are there," Lisa said. "I also support fundraisers and charities, and I sponsor community events."

Lisa hopes to continue growing her business, and as a wife and mom of four, she has plenty to keep her busy.

"We love living in our little town of Scribner," she said. "I do have plans to expand our business with a roasting side and then more shops. It is the American dream to open your own business and be successful. You don't have to be rich to make that dream happen. With a good plan, and help from places like the Center, it really is possible."

# Co-op grocery store creates community stability, new life

By Liz Stewart

Shopping at a small town grocery store is more than just buying food; it's chatting with a neighbor in the middle of the aisle, picking up the final ingredient to finish cooking dinner, and seeing a familiar face smiling at you from behind the cash register.

After the grocery store in Emerson, Nebraska, closed, those seemingly simple, but important, experiences were lost. Community leaders were concerned about elderly and food-insecure residents who may be unable to travel to a grocery store, as well as the loss of a vital business and connection point. They reached out to the Center for Rural Affairs for help after researching how the Center helped Cody, Nebraska, with its grocery store. Center staff assisted Emerson in forming a committee to brainstorm ideas on how to open a new store and solve some of their immediate needs for short-term food assistance.

Staff also provided resources about different business models and invited the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center to help with the community conversations. With community input, they determined that a cooperative, or co-op, business model was an option worth exploring.

In this case, Emerson residents wanted to find a way to bring back the small town charm of those friendly encounters as well as maintain access to fresh and staple foods in their hometown.

With the financial support of more than 100 investors, a board of directors was created, and Post 60 Market opened in 2022.

They recruited Emerson native Brian Horak who recently retired from the Air Force. He had experience working in both small and large grocery stores.

Brian has seen Post 60 through ups and downs, and worked with



Center staff Zulema Knievel and Carlie Jonas visit with Brian Horak, manager of Post 60 Market in Emerson, Nebraska. With more than 100 investors, the grocery store operates with a cooperative model. | Center file photo

investors and board members to build a solid foundation.

"There's a lot of money on the line," he said. "Initially, some board members wanted to be involved in everything, but now I feel fortunate that they trust me to make the big decisions."

Many of those decisions revolve around keeping track of the inventory and making sure customers are able to buy what they need most. Finding the right balance of products has been a learning experience for everyone involved.

If he could do it over, Brian would have bought only the basics to start with and then gone to his customers for feedback about what they would actually buy.

"That would have saved us thousands and thousands of dollars," he said.

Challenges aside, running a small town grocery store has plenty of perks, and the store has become more than a place to pick up groceries.

"Grocery stores do more than provide food for people, it's a social

experience and a chance to connect with others," Brian said.

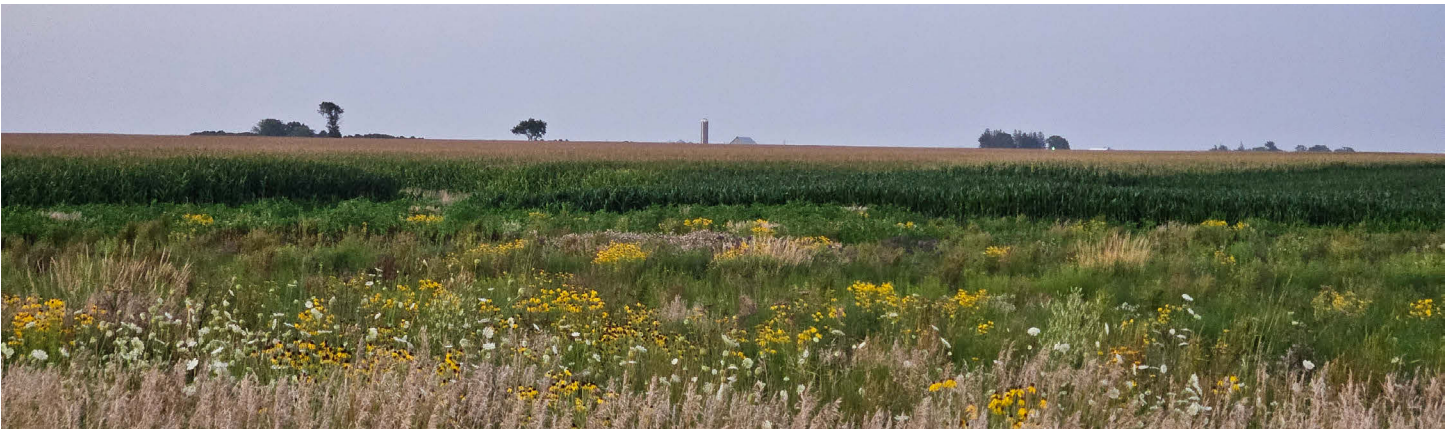
Post 60 Market also has led to more growth in Emerson. New life has begun to emerge on Main Street as two new businesses, a coffee shop and an event supply store, have found homes next door to the market.

Additionally, the town recently received a large grant to use to revitalize the downtown, which Brian said probably wouldn't have happened without the grocery store.

"It's a domino effect," he said.

Currently, Brian is working on an online shopping platform to make the shopping experience more convenient for customers.

"Our philosophy is first and foremost to serve the town," Brian said. "Secondary to that is to make money. We all put our own money into this store to get it going, and no one is really expecting that money back. It was a joint investment within the town to make sure Emerson residents don't have to travel miles and miles to get what they need."



A new report from the Center examines the historic increase in working lands conservation funding made available in recent years, and the demand that followed. | Photo by Cynthia Farmer

## New report examines positive impact of funding boost for producers, conservation in Iowa

By Kalee Olson, [kaleeo@cfra.org](mailto:kaleeo@cfra.org)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs that help producers incorporate conservation practices into their farm and ranch operations are popular with producers in Iowa. A new report from the Center examines the historic increase in funding made available for the programs in recent years, and the demand that followed.

“Making a Difference: The Inflation Reduction Act’s Impact on Working Lands Conservation Programs in Iowa” examines the amount of money and number of contracts distributed to Iowa’s producers through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) before and after passage of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

“Both EQIP and CSP have been underfunded and oversubscribed for years,” said Kalee Olson, policy manager for the Center and author of the publication. “This report helps us understand the impact made by critical investments in these programs through the IRA.”

Administered by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), EQIP and CSP

allow producers to implement conservation practices while keeping their land in production. The IRA allocated an additional \$8.45 billion for EQIP and \$3.25 billion for CSP nationwide to fund additional contracts through 2026.

“As a state with significant agricultural production, Iowa producers stood to benefit from support implementing practices such as no-till, cover crops, and prescribed grazing,” Kalee said.

Key findings include:

- In 2023 and 2024, the IRA made an additional \$54.1 million available to producers in Iowa through EQIP and CSP. For EQIP, the total amount awarded to producers in 2024 was a 108% increase from 2022 and a 96% increase from 2021. The total amount obligated to producers from CSP in 2024 was a 77% increase from 2022 and a 48% increase from 2021.

- In 2023 and 2024, the IRA funded an additional 1,055 EQIP and CSP contracts. For EQIP, the total number of contracts in 2024 increased by 47% from 2022 and 16% from 2021. The total number of CSP contracts in 2024 represents a 54% increase from 2022 and a 53% increase from 2021.

“The underlying significance of this data is that Iowa was able to forward 100% of the funding they received for EQIP and CSP from the IRA on to Iowa’s farmers,” Kalee said. “It demonstrates the dedication of local NRCS staff and the willingness of producers to go the extra mile for their operations and our natural resources.”

The report also examines the popularity of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) practices among producers. CSAF activities are conservation practices designated by USDA as critical tools in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon, in addition to other environmental and agricultural benefits.

“Producers demonstrate a growing interest in CSAF practices because soil health is good for the health of their operations, in terms of economics and sustainability,” Kalee said. “The fact that CSAF activities sequester carbon is an added benefit.”

To read “Making a Difference: The Inflation Reduction Act’s Impact on Working Lands Conservation Programs in Iowa,” visit [cfra.org/publications](http://cfra.org/publications).



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**Center for Rural Affairs statement on Solar for All**  
Formal notice of termination received for \$62.4 million grant

## Top 5 grant writing tips for rural leaders

By Deborah Solie, [deborahs@cfra.org](mailto:deborahs@cfra.org)

**W**riting a successful grant application is about more than filling out forms; it's about telling your community's story in a way that resonates with funders. Whether you're new to grant writing or just looking to strengthen your next proposal, these tips can help you put your best foot forward.

### 1. Start with your story

When applying for a grant, don't just list what you need; explain why it matters to your community. Frame your need in terms of community impact, urgency, and values. Share real stories, name the people or places impacted, and help the funder see the heart behind your work.

### 2. Apply for the right fit

Look for opportunities that align with your mission and values.

Read the guidelines carefully, and tailor your application to reflect the funder's priorities. Use their language, echo their values, and clearly show how your project supports their goals. If it doesn't align, don't apply—or if you're unsure, reach out to the program contact.

### 3. Show local support

Funders want to know you're not doing this alone. Even if your town is small, include letters of support, local partnerships, or volunteers involved. Highlight any collaboration between schools, churches, civic groups, or other nonprofits. It shows commitment and community buy-in.

### 4. Build a budget that tells the whole story

Keep your budget simple but clear. Funders want to know that you'll spend the money wisely and realistically. Be honest about costs (even if small), include in-kind

support if you have it (like donated space or volunteer time), and make sure the budget matches your mission.

### 5. Give yourself time and ask for help

Grant writing doesn't have to be perfect, but it does take time. Try not to write in a rush. Ask a trusted colleague to review your draft, preferably someone outside your project who can point out unclear parts. If there's technical language in the grant, ask for help translating it. You don't have to do it alone.

Grant writing goes beyond securing funding. When you take the time to craft a clear, compelling application, you build connections, tell your story, and invest in your community's future.

For more tips, check out [cfra.org/grant-application-guide](http://cfra.org/grant-application-guide).