

## WEEK #4 STATE OF THE CO-OP ADDRESS

I trust that you all had a good Easter, and took advantage of the many available technology-based options for worshipping together, but apart. Here we are in week #4 of closed lobbies to stem the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We are being told that this week is equivalent to 9-11 or D-Day, in its importance to stopping transmission of the virus. Several communities in RGEC's service territory have seen an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, and have implemented more stringent protective measures, such as wearing masks when in public, and limiting the number of people who can go in certain stores at one time. You can see the number of reported cases by county, and what each community is requiring, by checking the COVID-19 information on the RGEC website, [www.riogrande.coop/COVID](http://www.riogrande.coop/COVID). We update it every day by about 1:00-1:30 p.m. I hope that everyone is doing their part to stay at home, and remain socially distanced, unless classified as "essential". Isn't it strange that we can help most by just staying away from other people? Though it is hard on us all, as the social creatures we are, it will be worth it in the long run. As for the Co-op Family, I'm happy to report that we are all continuing to practice social distancing in a variety of ways, and all Co-op employees remain virus free and on the job.

To be honest, I was a little anxious about how well things would work with the lobbies being closed. I knew everything was set up perfectly, and had every confidence in the system and RGEC's employees. The only unknown variable in the equation was, frankly, member use of the technology. We have had it in place for quite a while, but getting people to really embrace it on such a grand scale was a bit concerning. There were a good number of people using SmartHub for account management, bill-paying, and energy usage alerts prior to the whole social distancing thing, and the Secure Pay phone system was also in place and working well for those who prefer to conduct business by phone.

The trepidation I had initially was way off base regarding your use of technology. I knew there would be a certain demographic who would eagerly grasp every component of technological business we launched. What I wasn't prepared for was that nearly EVERYONE not only has accepted and employed the technology – you are really ROCKING it!

Just this year, we've seen 171 new SmartHub registrations, and 62 of those have been in since March 16! The Secure Pay system, which allows you to conduct a variety of account-related activities by phone, has seen an uptick in use, as well (888-259-9084). Emails to the customer service representatives have been plentiful, as members have been utilizing this feature. You can access any of the CSR emails conveniently on our contact page, [www.riogrande.coop/contact](http://www.riogrande.coop/contact). Just click on the area office you want to email.

If you like the technological business options we've implemented thus far, you're going to love this one! Very soon, you'll be able to say, "Alexa, pay my Rio Grande Electric bill" to your home voice assistant. That's right, we are working on integrating voice assistant capabilities with SmartHub. Watch our social media pages and the RGEC edition of Ranch & Rural Living Magazine for more on the upcoming launch of this convenient feature.

Today is National Rural Electric Cooperative Lineman Day. We normally take about half an hour for breakfast tacos and a few well-deserved “atta boys” before the crews head out for a long day in the field. Of course, we are remaining socially distanced, so this is one of the things we will be missing this year. So, instead, I want to take advantage of this time to brag on our linemen and groundmen, who are actually future linemen. They are exceptionally talented, skilled, and are as resourceful a group of individuals as any organization ever had the good fortune to assemble. What’s more, these are the caliber of people you can depend on to carry out any task, without complaint or regard to their own comfort. They are completely dedicated to providing service for you. As you’ve probably noticed, storm season is upon us. They are illustrating my point through their actions on an almost-daily/nightly basis. I am proud of them, the work they do, and the people they are. Please join in wishing them well on our Lineman Appreciation Day post.

Until next week, we will continue providing the power you need, managing the day-to-day workings of the Co-op, and taking care of the employees, so they can continue to take care of you. You can do your part by staying home, staying away from stores and groups, and washing your hands. We’re all in this together, and only by cooperating with the recommendations can we help curb the spread of the virus, and allow us all to get back to some form of life as we knew it.

We miss you, and look forward to the time when we can once again greet you face-to-face, and shake your hand.

God bless,  
Roger Andrade, CEO