



Newsletter

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From Pilot Projects to Power Generation: Biodigester Tour Showcases Renewable Solutions

On August 21, members of SW CERTs, RSDP work groups, RMEB, and the Solid Waste Commission toured two innovative energy sites: the AURI Bioindustrial Innovation

Center in Waseca and the Home-town BioEnergy Facility in Le Sueur.

At AURI, participants learned about pilot-scale biodigesters, ag-based product innovation, and a Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) project. The tour then moved to Home-town BioEnergy, an 8 MW biomass facility that converts silage and food waste into renewable electricity for Minnesota communities.

Special thanks to AURI staff, including Harold Stanislawski, for their coordination, and to local legislators who joined the tour.



Inside silage bay

Southwest Regional Development Commission Celebrates Community Partnerships and Regional Progress at Annual Meeting

The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) hosted its Annual Meeting on Thursday, July 10, at the Hiawatha Lodge in Pipestone, bringing together commissioners, local officials, and regional partners to celebrate a year of progress and reaffirm their commitment to building a resilient, thriving Southwest Minnesota. SRDC Chair Paul Langseth welcomed attendees, expressing his gratitude to lead an organization that consistently puts “our communities, our people, and our future first.” As part of the day’s events, participants joined the sec-

ond annual SRDC Bus Tour, which highlighted four projects that demonstrate the Commission’s wide-ranging impact—trails and recreation in Woodstock, youth safety and walkability in Tyler, small business growth in Edgerton, and energy efficiency and entrepreneurship in Lake Benton. Each stop underscored the power of collaboration in creating community-centered solutions. To learn more, view the full annual report at <https://www.swrdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025-annual-report-layout.pdf>



Community members choosing amenities

Community Voices Shape Marshall’s Master Parks Plan

As part of the City of Marshall’s Master Parks Plan, SRDC staff connected with residents at National Night Out and the Marshall Area Farmer’s Market. These events provided a relaxed setting for community members to share which parks they value most and what new amenities they would like to see in the future.

The feedback gathered offered valuable insight into community priorities and will help guide the development of the Master Parks Plan. Through strategic planning services like this, SRDC helps communities align local voices with long-term goals to strengthen quality of life and guide future investments.

Project of the Year: Bolt's Lake Benton Grocery

SRDC proudly recognized Bolt's Lake Benton Grocery as its 2025 Project of the Year. Owners Bill and Kelly Bolt purchased the store days before the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 and have since transformed it into a vital community anchor. With 27 employees ranging from teens to seniors, Bolt's is more than a grocery store—it's a local employer, gathering place, and symbol of hometown commitment.

With assistance from SRDC's PACE program, the Bolts recently completed HVAC upgrades and installed energy-efficient refrigeration shades. Their story reflects the power of local partnerships and the impact of regional investment.



Kelly and Bill Bolt (left) were presented the 'Project of the Year' award from SRDC planner Nadya Bucklin

Southwest Minnesota Meat Processor Workforce Development Initiative

The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) has been awarded \$250,000 from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program to strengthen the meat and poultry processing workforce in southwest Minnesota. This initiative supports small- to medium-sized processors in hiring, training, and retaining employees.

In partnership with the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission, the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Ridge-water College, and the University of Minnesota, the program works to fill training gaps, provide on-the-job learning, and implement retention strategies that reduce employment barriers.

The goal is to invest in 30 individuals. So far, six participants have engaged in on-the-job training, and the next round of formal training will launch in Fall 2025. While participation has been lower than expected, resulting in the return of \$90,000 in unused training and retention funds, MDA has reallocated those dollars for a new round of funding.

SRDC is proud to be part of this effort to strengthen the region's meat processing sector and ensure long-term workforce sustainability.



Staff collaborated with several small business owners in the region to apply for the Good Food Access Program Equipment and Physical Improvements Grant. **Bolts Grocery Store in Lake Benton** received \$70,120, and **Ivanhoe Supermarket in Ivanhoe, MN**, received \$70,000—both receiving 100% of their grant requests.

The SRDC is working with several small businesses to apply for a new round of the **Minnesota Department of Agriculture's AGRI Meat Poultry Egg & Milk Processing Grant**, as well as a new Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 0% interest loan opportunity: The Small Business Environmental Improvement Loan.



Staff continue to seek funding sources to continue our food systems work. Most recently, we have applied for the **Bush Prize, Minnesota and the Compeer General Use Grant**. The outreach conducted when we launched the USDA Regional Food Business Center enhanced our relationships in the region and increased awareness of the SRDC's commitment to supporting small to midsize business owners. We want to continue that!

The **EDA Disaster NOFO** is soon to be released. These projects typically were funded at 80% grant rate. Eligible units of government, higher education, etc., based on FEMA disaster declarations (dec_4797.pdf), are those within Cottonwood, Jackson, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock counties. Staff are working on preliminary project plans with the **city of Wilder (and city of Windom)** on a wastewater sewer system, **city of Jackson** on an industrial park expansion, the **city of Pipestone** on an industrial park expansion, and potentially an application from a higher education institution (i.e. **MinnesotaWest**) for equipment or facility upgrades.

Revolving Loan Fund Program

The Southwest Regional Development Commission's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program continues to provide vital gap financing to support businesses across the region. By partnering with local lenders, SRDC helps businesses expand, create or retain jobs, and strengthen the regional economy. The RLF program is designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of entrepreneurs, ensuring that businesses have access to the resources they need to grow and thrive in Southwest Minnesota.



Site Visits and Success Stories



As part of the program, SRDC conducts site visits with participating businesses. While site visits are required every three years, they are often completed more frequently as

needed. These visits provide an opportunity to review annual tax documentation, carry out communication audits, and conduct interviews that help capture the story of each business. Many of these success stories are shared through the SRDC's Regional Spotlight initiative, which highlights the impact of local businesses and the role of SRDC programs in supporting their success.

You can explore these stories at <https://www.swrdc.org/regional-spotlight/>

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Program

The SRDC continues to offer Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing to help small businesses, agri-businesses, and eligible non-profits reduce their energy costs through efficiency upgrades. PACE allows property owners to finance improvements such as energy-efficient lighting, heating and cooling systems, insulation, and renewable energy projects, with repayment made through a special property tax assessment. This approach makes it easier for businesses to invest in long-term energy savings without impacting their bottom line.

Interest rates for new projects are set at 3% under Prime, with a floor of 3%, making PACE an affordable financing option for property owners ready to lower energy usage and utility expenses. SRDC encourages community members to help spread the word about this opportunity so more businesses can benefit from energy-saving improvements.

PACE Success Stories

A few recent success stories can be found on the SRDC website. <https://www.swrdc.org/spotlight/from-california-to-lake-benton-a-journey-of-community-and-commerce/>



St. James EV Ride and Drive

The City of St. James, in partnership with St. James Public Schools and Climate Smart, hosted an EV Ride and Drive event on Saturday, May 17, at the St. James Middle and High School. The event was coordinated with Recharge America, which provided key resources and outreach support.

In addition to offering test drives of three electric vehicles—the 2025 Volkswagen ID. Buzz, the 2025 Rivian R1S, and a Nissan Leaf—the event also featured a vendor and exhibit expo. Local and regional participants included the GreenStep Cities program, SWRSDP, Region 9, ECO Ambassadors, Fleet and Farm Supply, Harris Honey, Watonwan Public Library, Watonwan County Humane Society, and the Knights of Columbus. SRDC staff member Nadya Bucklin represented the Commission at the GreenStep table.

St. James, currently a Step 3 GreenStep City, is set to move up to Step 5 thanks to the work of their GreenCorps volunteer. The city was formally recognized for this achievement at the League of Minnesota Cities conference in June.

E-Bike Rental Program at End-O-Line Park in Currie:

Planner Webb has been facilitating meetings between Southwest Health and Humana Services, Murray County, and other local stakeholders in order to gauge the potential for an E-Bike Rental Program at End-O-Line Park in Currie. Box Car Wind awarded \$4,000 to Murray County and SWHHS awarded \$4,500 to this project. Bikes arrived in August for residents and visitors to use on the Casey Jones State Trail Loop located in Lake Shetek State Park.



SRDC Highlights FY25

Infrastructure & Economic Development

SRDC recently assisted several communities with key infrastructure and planning projects:

City of Adrian – Secured a \$1.63M EDA grant (50% of project cost) for a new electric substation.

City of Steen – Submitted a \$27,700 MPCA grant for stormwater planning.

City of Hardwick – Awarded a \$30,000 USDA SEARCH grant for water system improvements, including ADA upgrades and remote meter reading.

City of Wilder – Ongoing planning for sewer system improvements.

Cities of Pipestone & Jackson – Supporting planning efforts for industrial park development.

Education, Community & Workforce

Career Expo – Marshall & Worthington

Over 2,000 students attended the 2024 Career Expo in September. SRDC led the popular interactive activity “The Career is Right”, encouraging youth to explore local job opportunities.

Orientation for Elected Officials

Held March 21, 2025, at the Murray County 4-H Building, this orientation welcomed 23 officials and helped demystify SRDC’s work. Staff shared insights into the programs they lead, providing clarity and connection.

Southwest RSDP Annual Meeting

Nadya Bucklin attended the 2024 SW RSDP Annual Meeting in Lamberton, fostering connections and supporting sustainable development strategies.

Energy & Environment

SRDC received nearly \$100,000 from the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program, offering up to \$20,000 for local energy audits, engineering studies, and resiliency planning, with priority to disadvantaged communities. Executive Director Jay Trusty also recorded a renewable energy video for the Energy Ambassador Toolkit, and both Jay and Nadya Bucklin participated in the CERTs planning retreat. Locally, SRDC is helped explore an E-Bike rental program in Currie. Four bikes were added to the End-O-Line Park at the end of August hoping to encourage Casey Jones Trail use.

Business & Grant Support

SRDC supported several successful grant applications, including MPEM funding for Egans Market in Adrian (\$11,378) and Highwater Creek Meat Market for equipment upgrades. Through the Good Food Access Program, Bolts Grocery in Lake Benton (\$70,120) and Ivanhoe Supermarket (\$70,000) received grants to improve access to healthy food. SRDC also assisted with fire equipment funding, with the City of Jeffers awarded \$30,000 and an application submitted for Taylor Corporation.



SRDC Commissioners. sitting: Dan Delaney, Carrie Bendix, Mic VanDeVere, Leah Bittner, Tiffany Lesmeister-Knott, Paul Langseth, JoEllen Benson, Miron Carney, Rod Hamilton. Middle: Dennis Welgraven, Sherri Thompson, Mark Haberman, Rick Anderson, Donna Gravley, Lori Grant, Rick Von Holdt and Craig Rubis; Back: Jeff Moen, Steve Kellen, Chris Hollingsworth, Eric Hartman, Dennis Madson, Ron Kottke.

SRDC Commissioners

Cottonwood County

Jenny Quade, Municipalities
Ronald Kottke, Townships
Donna Gravley, Commissioners

Jackson County

Mark Haberman, Municipalities
Craig Rubis, Townships
Kent Bargfrede, Commissioners

Lincoln County

Lyndon Johnson, Municipalities
Jeff Moen, Townships
Mic VanDeVere, Commissioners

Lyon County

Pam Cooreman, Municipalities
Lori Grant, Townships
Rick Anderson, Commissioners

Murray County

Miron Carney, Municipalities
Vacant, Townships
Dennis Welgraven, Commissioners

Nobles County

Steve Kellen, Municipalities
Paul Langseth, Townships
Bob Paplow, Commissioners

Pipestone County

Dan Delaney, Municipalities
Vacant, Townships
Chris Hollingsworth, Commissioners

Redwood County

Leah Bittner, Municipalities
Tiffany Lesmeister-Knott, Townships
Bob Van Hee, Commissioners

Rock County

Dennis Madison, Municipalities
JoEllen Benson, Townships
Sherri Thompson, Commissioners

Cities over 10,000

Rick VonHoldt, City of Worthington
Bob Byrnes City of Marshall

Officers

Paul Langseth, Chair
Dennis Welgraven, Vice Chair
Rick Anderson, Treasurer
Eric Hartman, Secretary

Southwest MN School Boards

Eric Hartman

Lower Sioux Community

Vacant

Public Interest Groups

Rod Hamilton
Economic Development
Carrie Bendix, SW MN Private Industry Council
David Sturrock
SW MN Higher Education
Carol Biren,
Health & Human Services
Kristie Blankenship,
SW MN Housing Partnership

SRDC Staff

Jay Trusty

Executive Director

Robin Weis

Deputy Director

Melissa Nelson

Finance Director

Jason Walker

Community Development Director

Kim Murphy

Economic Development Specialist

Nadya Bucklin

Development Planner

Chris Webb

Transportation Planner

Kathy Schreiber

Administrative Specialist

Jodi Klein

Accounting Specialist

Sheila Crowley

Communications Specialist

