

# CUSTOM News

Representing Custom Farming in Wisconsin | SUMMER 2023



On Aug. 4, Gov. Tony Evers signed WI Act. 28 lengthening the term for Farm Service CDL holders. Photo by Joe Koshollek Wisconsin State Legislature

## Wisconsin Act 28 signed into law

By WCO

WCO members have been meeting with legislators for three years to discuss the shortage of CDL drivers. In early 2022, WCO formed an alliance with Dairy Business Association and Cooperative Network, targeting the Farm Service CDL as an area of opportunity to bring more drivers into the industry, increase public safety, and improve efficiency and sustainability of Wisconsin farms.

WCO elevated several potential changes to the Farm Service CDL program, including to extend the 180-day window to 210 days, which would be consistent with federal law.

In February, legislation for this needed improvement moved forward as Senate Bill 66 introduced by Sen. Cory Tomczyk (R-Mosinee) and Assembly Bill 74

introduced by Rep. Jon Plumer (R-Lodi).

On March 15, WCO members Ray and Holly Liska testified in favor of SB 66 during the Senate Transportation Committee hearing. On May 23, WCO Executive Director, Maria Woldt testified in favor of AB 74 during the Assembly Transportation Committee hearing.

Fast forward to Aug. 4, and Gov. Tony Evers officially signed SB 66 into law, becoming Wisconsin Act 28.

Act 28 adjusts the maximum number of days a seasonal farm service industry employee can hold a restricted commercial driver's license to 210 days to match current federal rules.

WCO thanks all the ag groups who supported this legislation. As a small organization, their support was vital. 🇺🇸

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## UPCOMING DATES:

**WCO Mini-grant program**  
Accepted on a rolling basis

**WCO Fundraising Auction**  
Coming in December

**Forage Symposium**  
Feb. 19-21, 2024  
Chula Vista, Wis. Dells

## CONTACT WCO:

execdir@wiscustomoperators.org  
(608) 577-4345

## From the President's Cab: *WCO is working year-round*

By William Smith



Like much of Wisconsin, we experienced a productive spring with good planting conditions and a bountiful first crop.

But nature had other plans for June, and drought-like conditions started to set in. However, we did get a few 'million dollar' rains and things started to look up. Farming is always a gamble, and this season is no different. If anything, it's been the best season I can remember to make dry hay!

A few weeks ago, the board met in Baraboo for our summer meeting. To encourage attendance during the busiest months, we pair our summer meeting with Farm Technology Days, and choose a location that is adjacent to the show grounds. This year, we hosted our meeting at Driftless Glen Distillery in the heart of Baraboo and enjoyed an insider tour where we learned about the bourbon and spirit-making process. This facility is a destination, we highly recommend taking a tour.

This time of year, the WCO board is busy running our businesses and working with clients. However, the business of running the association operates year-round. In May, the scholarship and awards committee collected and ranked our 2023 scholarship applications. The caliber of this year's cohort is excellent and best of all - very diverse in terms of fields

**“As always, our Symposium topics come directly from WCO members using the hand-written surveys. Save the dates of Feb. 19-21, 2024, at the Chula Vista.”**

of study. New this year, the committee expanded the program to include non-degree certifications like CDL training. Word is getting out because there were several applicants pursuing this training.

In June, the education committee prioritized topics for the 2024 Forage

Symposium, and we will begin contacting speakers in August. As always, our topics come directly from WCO members using the hand-written surveys after each session. Save the dates of February 19-21, 2024, at the Chula Vista for our annual event. You will not be disappointed.

In addition to planning our education content, WCO has been following agriculture and transportation legislation during the biennial budget process. We are thrilled to report that SB 66 (Farm Service CDL) made it through the senate and assembly with bi-partisan co-sponsorship and support. This bill will allow more CDL-eligible drivers to transport things like feed, equipment, and manure to and from the farm and fields by expanding the timeframe from 180 days to 210 days. We asked the Governor's office for a public bill signing which Maria attended on Aug. 4. Read about more WCO legislative involvement on page 10.

As always, stay safe this season, and please contact us with any feedback about the association or issues you are having in the field. Thank you for your ongoing support. 🇺🇸





## How can AgrAbility help YOU this growing season? *By Andrea Klahn*



*Andrea Klahn*

During the 2023 growing season, remember to include your health and safety in your farm plans.

Farming is hard on your body, but there are tools and equipment to help lessen the wear and tear.

"Sometimes, it's as easy as adding an extra step and handrail to your tractor or installing an automatic hitch," says Andrea Klahn, Outreach Specialist for AgrAbility of Wisconsin.

Since 1991, AgrAbility of Wisconsin has been promoting success in agriculture for farmers and their families living with a farm injury, disability, or health limitation. How can we help you?

"After enrollment, a rep from the Easterseals FARM program will visit your farm and evaluate your situation," explains Klahn. "They can take a closer look at equipment and processes. It's a fresh perspective for your operation."

AgrAbility of Wisconsin serves all types of farmers and farms, large and small. This grant-funded program through USDA is free to farmers! You can easily enroll in our program on our website or give us a call. It takes 15 minutes. We ask you basic health information, but no medical records are required.

The AgrAbility program focuses on information and referrals. Once enrolled in our program you will have a phone call from one of our case workers and set up a farm visit with one of our rural rehab specialists.

Our rehab specialist will come out to your farm and watch the type of tasks you do on a daily basis. They will give

you tips and ideas of how to make them easier with your disability and share ways to help you find monetary funds if needed.

AgrAbility of Wisconsin is a partnership between the UW Madison Division of Extension and Easterseals Wisconsin. Being a grant-funded organization, one of the rules we follow is to not reach out directly to farmers and ask them to sign up for our program.

We need farmers to contact us. If you know someone with a disability or limiting work condition who works or owns a farm, even works in agriculture, please share our information with them and encourage them to learn more.

Looking for more information on AgrAbility of Wisconsin? Give us a call (608) 262-9336 or visit our website, [agrability.bse.wisc.edu](http://agrability.bse.wisc.edu).

*Andrea Klahn joined the AgrAbility staff in August 2022. Annie grew up on a farrow-to-finish hog and cash crops farm in Lodi, Wis. She has a degree in Life Sciences Communications from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and previously worked in marketing and communications for a dairy cooperative.*

**About 19 percent of the country's farmers have some type of disability, according to the USDA Economic Research Service. Programs like AgrAbility work to help farmers with a disability in any way they can to keep producing.**



**Over 4,000 injuries occur on Wisconsin farms each year, many resulting in permanent disabilities. Without tractor lifts like this one, some farmers would not be able to safely get in and out of their equipment. Photo by AgrAbility**

## Member survey data on the WCO website

Data from the most recent member survey is live on the WCO website. Go to [wiscustomoperators.org](http://wiscustomoperators.org) and click the “resources” tab. From the drop down, select “member services and rate information”. Users have the option to view rates only, or the entire survey, which contains information on technology adoption, employee management, and other relevant topics.

WCO invested significant time and money into the member survey itself and the resulting data visualization. We hope that you will find value in this resource! 🍷



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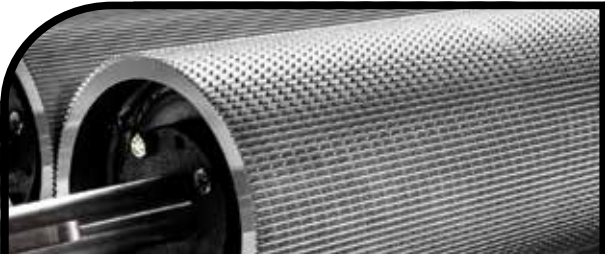
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More info coming soon!



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## WCO honors additional scholarship winner; Fundraising auction planned for December *By WCO*

The WCO board feels strongly that supporting the custom farming community and allied agriculture partners are a good use of WCO's membership and sponsorship dollars. To this end, WCO gives scholarships and other awards to deserving students, community groups and crew members.

### Additional scholarship winner



*Katelyn Meinholz*

WCO recently awarded two scholarships to students pursuing further education. The WCO scholarship and awards committee

selected *one additional* student for the 2022-23 scholarship cohort.

These students were selected based on leadership, civic engagement, academics, and volunteer activities related to agriculture. Students also submitted

essays detailing their educational and vocational plans.

Scholarship winners are required to have ties to the WCO – either as a member, relative of a member or employee of a member. Students received a \$1,000 or \$1,500 scholarship.

Katelyn Meinholz is the daughter of WCO members Brian and Rhonda Meinholz from Blue Star Dairy Farm in DeForest. Katelyn recently completed her freshman year at UW-Platteville and is studying Agribusiness and Spanish.

She recently studied abroad with the School of Agriculture in Spain where she toured several agriculture facilities including swine, goat, equine, olive, and wine. This summer she is interning with SeedLink LLC in Cambria where she is assisting in field signing, crop scouting, and research.

After college, she plans to return to the family dairy farm, which she credits as


the reason she has had so many great opportunities throughout the years.

“Receiving this award was such a blessing and I am so thankful for everyone at WCO who chose me as a recipient. I will use the scholarship toward my tuition in the fall and I highly encourage any parents with college-age kids to have them apply, this team will work with you and genuinely wants you to succeed,” Katelyn said.

The 2023 cohort of scholarship winners has been selected and will be announced after their fall grades are verified, per program rules.

### Fundraising auction

WCO is partnering with Hansen Auction Group for another online auction in December. WCO receives 2 percent of the 10 percent buyer's fee, which represents significant dollars for our group.

Watch your email for more details about how to consign and purchase from the auction. 



## Don't forget about WCO's mini-grant program!

In addition to scholarships and other awards, WCO has a mini-grant program designed to provide smaller, more flexible awards to assist with important projects or programs that will benefit the custom farming community and the ag community.

The WCO board feels strongly that it is important to invest in great people and innovative ideas. To learn more about the mini-grant program and to download the application, go to [wiscustomoperators.org](http://wiscustomoperators.org) and click the "about us" tab.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and awards range from \$500-\$5,000. Funding is available as soon as

the application is approved by WCO. Funds are distributed as follows: 50% upon application approval and 50% upon receipt of final report.

Like most grants, there are reporting obligations and we also ask that recipients be willing to speak about their project at a WCO event such as the annual Forage Symposium.

Priority is given to projects that:

>>Directly benefit the custom farming community

>>Involve custom farmers or clients of custom farmers

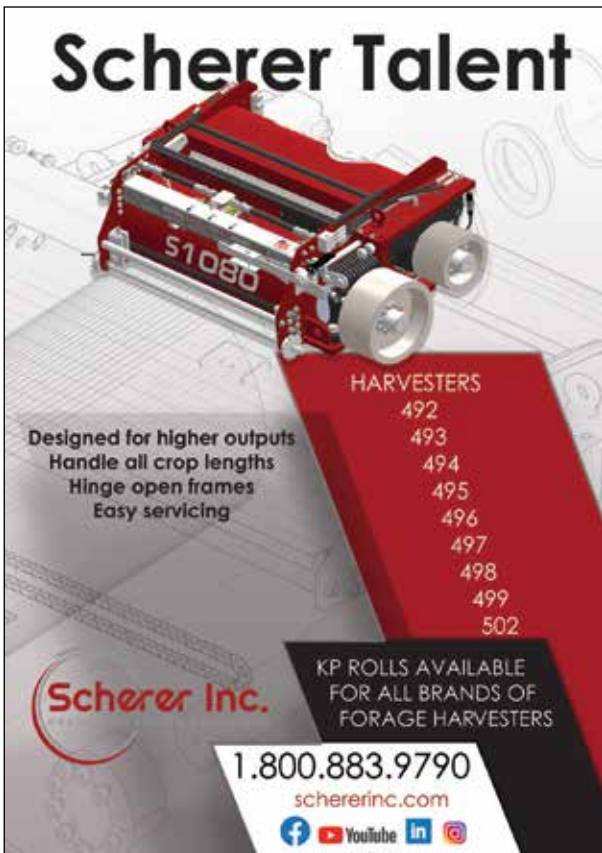
>>Involve post-secondary student research or organization opportunities

>>Emphasize farm safety and health, leadership, teamwork, sustainability, innovation or community involvement

This program is open to university/technical college faculty, staff, students, student organizations or non-profit organizations. Others deemed appropriate by the WCO Scholarship and Awards Committee will also be considered.

Examples include: Funding for students as part of larger project, costs associated with hosting an event or farmer meeting, incentive funds for farmers/custom farmers to try new practices.

Questions? Call (608) 577-4345 or email [execdir@wiscustomoperators.org](mailto:execdir@wiscustomoperators.org)



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## Membership incentive program

Don't forget - WCO has a membership incentive program! If you sign up a new member you receive \$25 towards your 2024 membership. Sponsors can participate also. Simply list your company name on the "referred by" line and earn money towards your 2024 membership or sponsorship.

Incentive not to exceed cost of membership or sponsorship. Help WCO grow our membership base!

## Welcome to WCO

**General Members (\$50/year)** derive their income (whole or part) from custom farming. Receive full voting rights and featured on website with business information.

**Associate Members (\$50/year)** support the custom farming industry, but do not engage in custom farming themselves.

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## Welcome new members!

These individuals/sponsors joined WCO from March – July 2023

- » Karisa Taylor, Poettinger US Inc

## Policy corner *issues to watch*

**Rural road funding** – Assembly Bill 244 was signed into law, becoming WI Act 13, the Agricultural Roads Improvement Program. This legislation includes \$150 million in one-time money for a grant program available to rural municipalities. Unlike most available grant programs, no matching funds are required. For small, rural towns, this is a huge opportunity. If a municipality takes this grant money, they cannot seasonally post the effected roads.

**Mandatory farmer representation on county conservation committees** – Assembly Bill 131, was signed into law, becoming WI Act 32, ensures that there will continue to be a voice for agriculture on county conservation committees. Prior law required the appointment of representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) to represent the interests of farmers on the committees but recently FSA raised concern that having their members on these committees created a conflict of interest. Act 32 amends the statute to instead mandate the appointment of an individual actively engaged in farming to the committees.

**State budget signed** – In early July, the 2023-2025 biennial state budget was signed, including 51 partial vetos. The partial veto allows for business on mutually agreed items to move forward, without having to veto an entire budget.

### The state budget contained some “pro-agriculture” items such as:

- » Additional funds for dairy exports
  - » Dairy processor grants
  - » Meat processor grants
  - » Increase in cover crop insurance rebate program
  - » Nitrogen optimization pilot program
  - » Two percent increase in general funding for transportation
  - » WI Act 28 signed into law, Farm Service CDL timeframe lengthened to 210 days in line with federal law.
- See cover story*



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## Please send your photos to WCO

Photos featured in the *Custom News* are taken by staff or submitted by members and sponsors. We are always looking for high quality images and we do our best to feature diverse equipment brands and custom farming practices.

Please e-mail your high-resolution images (1MB or larger) to [execdir@wiscustomoperators.org](mailto:execdir@wiscustomoperators.org) and we will be sure to feature you on our social media channels and in our publications. Thank you in advance! 🇺🇸



WCO Executive Director Maria Woldt and her daughter Giovanna at the Touch-a-Truck event in Greenfield.



The WCO board toured Driftless Glen Distillery in Baraboo, Wis. where they learned about agriculture involved in spirit-making. Photo by WCO



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Questions about loH definitions and rules? Go to  
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*Photo by Maass Farms, Seymore, Wis.*