

CUSTOMNews

Representing custom farming in Wisconsin and beyond | **SPRING 2024**



The 2024 Wisconsin Custom Operators board of directors.
Photo by Troy Meyer

WCO members elect directors, new officers, retiring director honored By WCO

WCO members recently elected two directors, new officers, and honored a retiring director during the group's annual business meeting on Feb. 21, held in conjunction with the Forage Symposium at the Chula Vista Resort.

Pat Johnson was re-elected to a second term on the board, while Bruce Dannenberg is a new addition.

Johnson is the operations manager of Larson Acres Dairy in Evansville. This multi-generation farm milks 2,800 cows and farms more than 5,000 acres. He also has experience as a custom manure hauler and business owner. Public perception of agriculture, especially manure application, is very important to Johnson. He is also passionate about

helping younger people enter the custom farming industry because there are often fewer barriers to entry than traditional farming for someone without a family farm connection. Johnson and his wife have two children and raise and direct market beef.

Dannenberg is co-owner of Triple D Farms in Mineral Point. He manages crops for the 2,000-acre farm along with spraying and spreading applications. He oversees business finance and insurance, and custom TMR feeding for a local dairy. When needed, he drives chopper, truck, and pack tractor for harvest. Dannenberg also handles most of the combine work for soybean harvesting while the rest of the crew is finishing up silage harvest.

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UPCOMING DATES:

WCO Mini-grant program
Accepted on a rolling basis

WCO Scholarships
Applications due May 1

Forage Symposium
Feb. 17-19, 2025
Chula Vista, Wis. Dells

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(608) 577-4345

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From the President's Cab: We're in a "relationships" business

By John Osterhaus



Greetings from Northwestern Illinois as spring is showing signs of arriving. This past February, I was elected as your new WCO president, and I would like to introduce myself to you.

My wife Monica and I own and operate Silver Streak Ag Services LLC in Chadwick, Illinois. We do custom forage harvesting in Northern Illinois, and we offer a full line of forage harvesting services, chopping, mowing, baling etc. We started our business with a used round baler and a very used tractor in 2011, and we have been able to grow every year since. We currently have over 70 customers across Northern Illinois, and we also have a short line equipment dealership as part of our business. We sell and service Meyer Manufacturing, Meyers Equipment, and Demco product lines.

One of my personal goals as president this coming year is to focus on helping WCO become more of a regional organization rather than state specific. We have an opportunity with WCO to reach out to operators outside of

Wisconsin and have them become a part of our organization. My belief is that the more members we have, the stronger our organization will be.

I have been asked by several potential members why they should join WCO. If I had to pick just one word or reason, it would be "relationships".

“ Relationships with other operators, vendors, business owners, and manufactures are what make our organization special ”

Relationships with other operators, vendors, business owners, and manufactures are what make our organization special. We have the opportunity to get to know a select group of people that do this kind of work, be it forage harvesting, manure application, planting etc. By being a member, I have made connections and friendships with other operators that I can call and ask

questions when I need help. I also have been able to build relationships with several equipment manufacturers. This allows me to go straight to the source when I have an issue. These relationships are a huge benefit to our businesses.

I recently had the opportunity to visit two different forage harvest crews out of state, one in Southern California and the other in South Georgia. Both crews were in the early stages of spring chopping. In California, they were chopping early alfalfa that had freeze damage, and the Georgia crew was starting triticale harvest. It was very interesting to see how they dealt with in each situation. Many of their struggles were like what we see in the Midwest, but they also had many unique challenges. It was a great opportunity to learn from them, ask tons of questions, and bring some tips and tricks home. I had this opportunity because of the relationships built over the years. I highly recommend visiting a crew either locally or out of state if the chance comes up.

Spring is coming, I hope you and your crew have a safe and prosperous spring and summer. 🇺🇸

- John

board changes
(continued from p. 1)

Outside of farming, he and his family enjoy showing pigs and are active in the Badger State Tractor Pullers.

Officers were selected by the WCO board of directors. John Osterhaus, owner of Silver Streak AG Services in Chadwick, Ill. will serve as president and Jeremy Heim, co-owner of Heim Brothers Custom in Kewaunee as vice-president. Randy Clark, owner of RCI Engineering in Mayville was elected as secretary and Isaac Lemmenes, product specialist for Nuhn Industries, was re-elected treasurer.

Osterhaus owns Silver Streak AG Services in Chadwick, Ill. with his wife, Monica. Together, they harvest 5,000 acres annually in Northwest Illinois and sell and service Meyer Manufacturing equipment. In addition to WCO, he is an active member US Custom Harvesters. The Osterhaus' have three grown children, including a son, Alan, who has continued his passion for agriculture as a marketing specialist for CLAAS of America. Two of their children have been awarded WCO scholarships.

Heim is co-owner of Heim Brothers Custom in Kewaunee, a 200-million gallon per year custom manure hauling and chopping business. In addition to the custom business, Heim is co-owner of an 850-cow dairy, Heim's Hillcrest Dairy. Together with this wife Kari, Heim has two kids, Ben (18) and Kiley (27). Kiley has been working full time on the farm since 2013 focusing on calf care and Ben plays a big role in field work and the custom business.

Clark is the owner of RCI Engineering in Mayville, where he designs and manufactures equipment solutions for



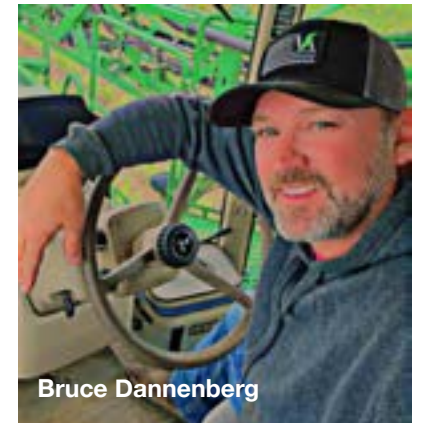
William Smith, left, retired from the WCO board of directors and was honored for his years of service to the organization. Photo by Troy Meyer.

the hay and forage industry, including plot research equipment and the Ag-Bag product line. In addition to WCO, he is involved with Wisconsin Section of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers, Midwest Forage Association, and other industry groups.

Clark credits his wife, Wendy, for his success in business and in life. The two work together at RCI Engineering where Wendy serves as marketing manager. They have three boys, Ryan (16), Isaac (14) and Colin (11) and enjoy snowmobiling, hunting, and whatever adventures the boys want to seek out.

Retiring board member and former president William Smith, owner of Smith Custom Farming LLC in Darlington, was honored for his years of service to WCO.

Learn more about the WCO board and committee assignments at wiscustomoperators.org 🇺🇸



Bruce Dannenberg



Pat Johnson



WCO announces scholarship winners; 2024 applications due May 1 By WCO

WCO recently awarded two scholarships to students pursuing further education. 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 for the future. Scholarship winners are required to have ties to the WCO – either as a member, relative or employee of a member, or as a relative of a member-client. Students received a \$1,000 or \$1,500 scholarship.

“WCO understands that continued success of Wisconsin’s agricultural economy depends on a well-trained

workforce,” said Joseph Sanford, chairman of the WCO Scholarship and Awards Committee and an assistant professor in the School of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville. “We also recognize that there are a growing number of training opportunities to fulfill this need, ranging from traditional college experiences to trade and apprenticeship programs.”

Kaleb Ellis of Independence, Wis. was selected to receive the \$1,500 Robert Hoerth Memorial Scholarship to honor WCO Past President Robert Hoerth who passed away unexpectedly in early 2020. This award is given to the most deserving scholarship applicant based on their alignment to the overall criteria.

Kaleb recently earned his class A commercial driver’s license (CDL) and is already working toward his goal of starting a custom farming business. Last summer he joined a large custom farming crew and harvested wheat and other crops across Washington state and Idaho. Back in Wisconsin, Kaleb is an employee of Dan Val Farms LLC, a custom farming business owned by his uncle Chris Ellis. In his free time, Kaleb raises 85-100 Duroc hogs and rents 100 acres of row crop ground.

Emily Volmer of Hilbert, Wis. received a \$1,000 scholarship. She is a freshman at Drake University majoring in politics with plans to attend law school to pursue a career in public service and government. Emily credits her interest in U.S. history for sparking her passion in government and the reason she wants to work in public service.



Kaleb Ellis



Emily Volmer

To view the scholarship application, scan the QR code.



Emily is the daughter of Greg and Jennifer Volmer, owners of Midlakes Custom Services LLC and long-time members of WCO. From an early age, Emily developed a strong work ethic by helping in the family business assisting with miscellaneous tasks like picking rocks, transporting employees, and helping in the office.

Applications for the WCO scholarship are due May 1. More information is on the WCO website under “about us”.

In 2024, three (3) awards will be given: Two (2) \$1,000 scholarships and the \$1,500 Robert Hoerth Memorial Scholarship.

To be eligible, applicants may have direct family ties to a current WCO member or to an employee of a WCO member. Applicants may also be a member themselves. In addition, A WCO member may nominate a scholarship applicant who does not meet the above criteria. For example, if a WCO member has a customer who has an exemplary son, daughter, or employee, they are eligible to apply.

The program has been expanded to include any post-secondary training program including traditional college experiences *and* career training programs such as CDL truck driver training courses, pesticide applicator training program/exam, or other industry relevant training programs. Individuals on a non-academic post-secondary education path searching for career opportunity in the industry such as joining a harvest crew or other apprenticeship program, are also encouraged to apply.

Member survey data on the WCO website

Data from the most recent member survey is live on the WCO website. Go to wiscustomopertors.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!



To view the WCO member survey, scan the QR code.



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HPAI Detection in Kansas, Texas Dairy Herds

By USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as state veterinary and public health officials, are investigating an illness among primarily older dairy cows in Texas, Kansas, and New Mexico that is causing decreased lactation, low appetite, and other symptoms.

As of Monday, March 25, unpasteurized, clinical samples of milk from sick cattle collected from two dairy farms in Kansas and one in Texas, as well as an oropharyngeal swab from another dairy in Texas, have tested positive for

highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Additional testing was initiated on Friday, March 22, and over the weekend because farms have also reported finding deceased wild birds on their properties. Based on findings from Texas, the detections appear to have been introduced by wild birds. Initial testing by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories has not found changes to the virus that would make it more transmissible to humans, which would indicate that the current risk to the public remains low.

Federal and state agencies are moving quickly to conduct additional testing for HPAI, as well as viral genome sequencing,

so that we can better understand the situation, including characterization of the HPAI strain or strains associated with these detections.

Wild migratory birds believed to be source of infection; viral testing efforts continue – Commercial milk supply remains safe due to both federal animal health requirements and pasteurization.



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 and the ag communities.

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 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:

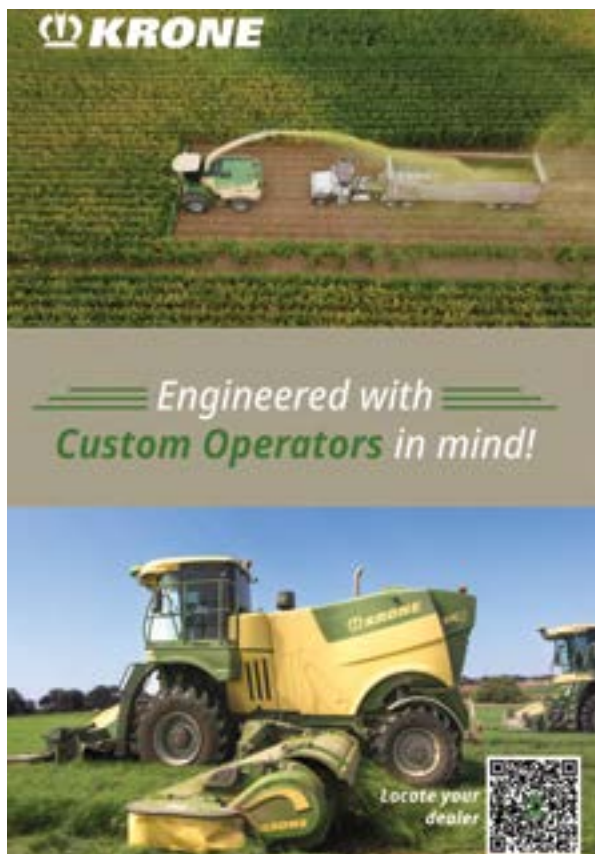
- >>Directly benefit the custom farming community
- >>Involve custom farmers or clients of custom farmers
- >>Involve post-secondary student research or organization opportunities
- >>Emphasize farm safety and health,

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



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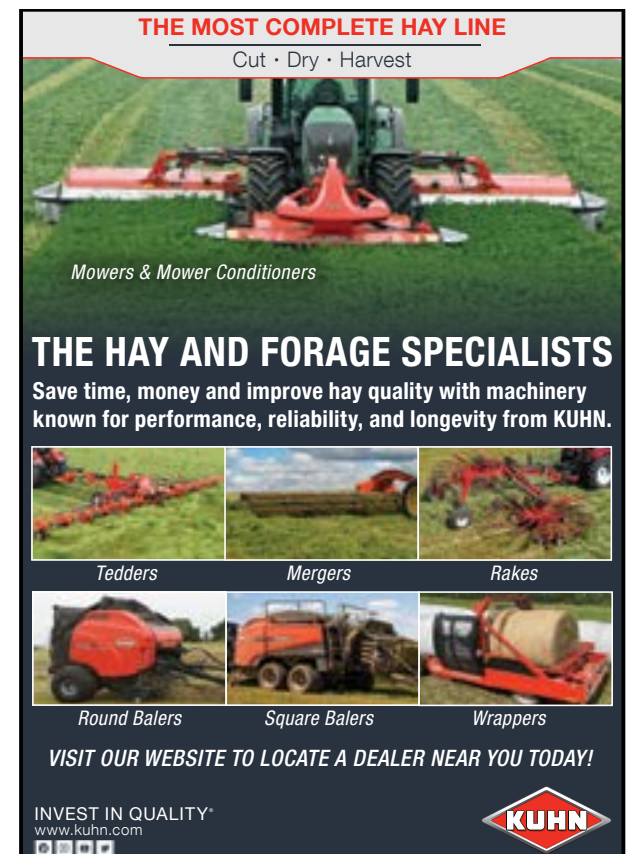
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Membership incentive program

Don't forget - WCO has a membership incentive program! If you sign up a new member you receive \$25 towards your 2025 membership. Sponsors can participate also. Simply list your company name on the "referred by" line and earn money towards your 2025 membership or sponsorship.

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

Welcome to WCO

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Welcome new members!

These individuals/sponsors joined WCO from Nov. 2023 – March 2024

- » Seth Buxcel, BXL Inc.
- » Alex Enyart, Enyart Farms
- » Peyton Erbsen, Erbsen Ag Services
- » Conner Geurts
- » Darrin Herickhoff, D&H Field Services Inc
- » Jess Hoyt, HD Custom Forage Harvesting
- » Jim Huber, Apollo-Vale Enterprizes
- » Chris Koenig, Top Gear Farms
- » Norm Kowitz, Sullivan Custom Farming
- » Dustin Kragness, Kragness Custom Ag
- » Erica Kragness, Kragness Custom Ag
- » Bryan Krahenbuhl, Kranks Custom Farming
- » Tim Malin, No-Lo Moo Poo
- » Todd Meyer, Meyer Farms Inc
- » Trent Morning, Kragness Custom Ag
- » Jarrod Paulson, Top Dear Farms
- » Michael Paulson, Manthe-Paulson Farms
- » Colin Wussow, Milk-N-More Harvesting
- » Matt Zellner, Ducat Farms Custom Work

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 exccdir@wiscustomoperators.org and we will be sure to feature you on our social media channels and in our publications. Thank you in advance! 🍷



Keynote speaker Jolene Brown gave two thought provoking sessions at Forage Symposium about family business and transition planning.

Manthe wins \$1,000 grand prize!



Daryll Manthe from D&J Manthe Forage Services in DeForest, Wis. won \$1,000 at the recent WCO annual meeting during Forage Symposium. Members were entered to win after completing the online member survey and Daryll's name was chosen at random. Congrats Daryll! 🍷

Additional policy and safety considerations

ARIP: During the 2023-2024 legislative session, the Agriculture Roads Improvement Plan (ARIP) received \$150 million. This program is designed to address roads used by farmers, dairy processors, and other sectors that are often "posted" and are in disrepair. Local governments applied through a competitive process and grants will be awarded as a 90-10 cost share where the state pays 90% and the applicant pays 10%.

Manure application permits: WCO has heard of at least one township requiring permits for farms to haul manure. To this

point, the permits are inexpensive and will help the township maintain roads, etc. If you hear of any similar permits being required, please let us know.

WCO Certification Program: Safety is the cornerstone of WCO and we are proud to offer a robust certification program. To become certified:

- Attend an in-person safety event, coordinated by WCO, dealerships, or other association and submit materials
- Attend Forage Symposium for safety sessions, noted in registration materials 🍷



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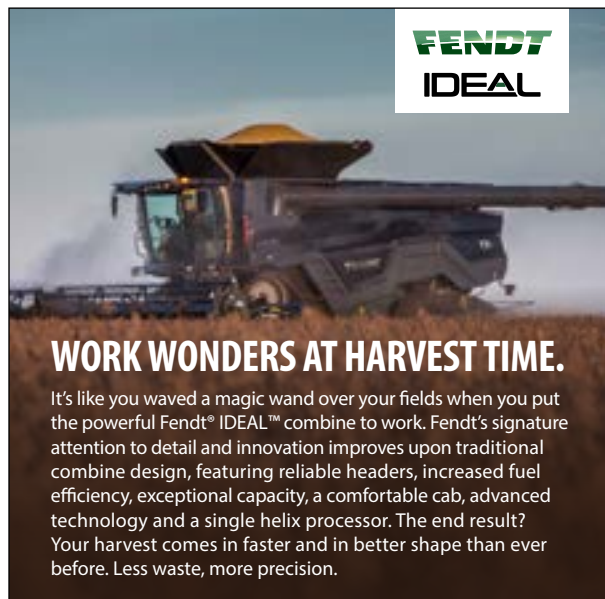
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Heim Brothers Custom, Kewaunee, Wis. Photo by Dan Hegenow