

# CUSTOM News

Representing custom farming in Wisconsin and beyond | **SPRING 2026**



The 2026 Wisconsin Custom Operators board of directors.  
Photo by Izzy Dannenberg

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

Wisconsin Custom Operators members re-elected three directors and filled one corporate vacancy during the group's annual business meeting held Feb. 18 in conjunction with the Forage Symposium at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Re-elected to the board of directors were John Osterhaus (at-large director), Jeremy Heim (north region director), and Randy Clark (corporate director). Josh Harkenrider was elected to fill a special two-year corporate director position vacated following the retirement of Steve Pesik from Zimmerman Manufacturing.

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 of U.S. Custom Harvesters. The Osterhauses have three grown children.

Heim is co-owner of Heim Brothers Custom in Algoma, Wis., a high-capacity manure hauling and chopping business serving approximately 30 farms. He is also co-owner of Heim's Hillcrest Dairy. Heim and his wife, Kari, have two children who are active in the family's farming operations.

Clark is owner of RCI Engineering in Mayville, Wis., where he designs and manufactures equipment solutions for the hay and forage industry, including

## UPCOMING DATES:

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

**Forage and Manure Safety Day**  
April 9, 2026  
Arlington, Wis.

**WCO Scholarships**  
Applications due May 1

**Forage Symposium**  
Feb. 15-17, 2027  
Chula Vista, Wis. Dells

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*Continued on p. 3*

## From the President's Cab: *Leadership, learning, lasting connections*

By John Osterhaus



Serving on the WCO board has been a rewarding experience, both professionally and personally. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to grow not only as a business owner, but also as a leader within this industry. Being part of WCO has pushed me to think beyond my own business and consider the bigger picture—how we support one another, improve safety, and continue moving the custom industry forward.

One of the most valuable aspects of serving on the board is the people you meet along the way. Through WCO and our connections with U.S. Custom Harvesters and other industry groups, I've had the chance to meet operators from across the Midwest and throughout the country. It's always encouraging to hear that others are familiar with WCO and recognize the work being done in Wisconsin. Those conversations—whether at meetings, events, or out in the field—reinforce the strength of this organization and the reputation it has built over time.

Our board meetings are another highlight of the experience. We intentionally rotate locations around the state and pair meetings with tours of member businesses, equipment manufacturers, or ag businesses. That gives us the chance to learn from a wide range of businesses and perspectives. No two locations are the same, and each visit brings new ideas that we can take back to our own businesses and share with the membership.

These experiences also provide valuable insight into how diverse our industry really is. From large-scale businesses to smaller businesses, each stop offers a different perspective on how operators manage crews, equipment, and risk. Seeing these

approaches in action helps spark new ideas and encourages continuous improvement, both individually and as an organization.

“Some of the most valuable conversations happen in between meetings—those shared moments build relationships, strengthen the board, and ultimately make our work more effective.”



Last July, WCO Vice-President Jeremy Heim from Heim Brothers Custom and Heim's Hillcrest Dairy hosted the WCO and PNAAW boards for a meeting and tour.

While we offer a call-in option for meetings, there's no substitute for being there in person. Some of the most valuable conversations happen in between agenda items—during meals, on tours, or just catching up before and after meetings. Those moments help build stronger relationships within the board, and that connection carries over into better discussions and decision-making. It's those shared experiences that bring the group closer together and make the work we do more effective.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside a dedicated board who care deeply about this industry. WCO continues to be a place where ideas are shared, challenges are discussed openly, and solutions are built together. I encourage anyone who has an interest to get involved—whether that's attending events, participating in discussions, or considering future leadership roles. It's an investment that pays back in knowledge, relationships, and growth. 🇺🇸

## board changes

*(continued from p. 1)*

products within the Ag-Bag line. He is active in several agricultural and engineering organizations and continues to support innovation within the custom farming sector.

Harkenrider serves as a hay and forage product specialist with New Holland Agriculture, supporting dealers and customers across the Midwest. With 18 years of experience in the custom harvesting industry and manufacturer-side expertise, he brings a broad regional perspective to the board.

Officers were selected by the WCO board of directors following the annual meeting. John Osterhaus was re-elected president, and Jeremy Heim was re-elected vice president. Charlie Schultz of Schultz Bros Forage Service, LLC in Orangeville, Ill. was re-elected treasurer. Newly elected as secretary is Bruce Dannenberg of Triple D Farms in Mineral Point, Wis.

WCO leadership continues to focus on safety training, member education, industry advocacy, and strengthening partnerships across the agricultural community. Last year, WCO formalized its affiliation with the Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin (PNAAW) and continues to expand programming through the annual symposium and spring safety certification event.

The annual meeting and symposium once again proved to be a valuable opportunity for members to connect, share best practices, and learn from one another. The event fostered meaningful conversations around business management, labor, regulatory updates, and community engagement, while also



**Josh Harkenrider, hay and forage product specialist for New Holland Agriculture was elected to the WCO board of directors to complete a two-year corporate term. He has been active in WCO for many years, serving on several committees and contributing to the success of the organization.**

highlighting emerging trends impacting the custom industry. Attendees exchanged practical ideas and real-world experiences.

In addition to the business meeting, attendees participated in educational sessions focused on forage management, equipment innovation, and business efficiency. The combination of technical learning and peer-to-peer discussion reinforced the value of the symposium as a place to exchange ideas and stay current with industry trends.

Looking ahead, WCO leaders emphasized the importance of member involvement and engagement in shaping the organization's direction. With continued investment in training programs, partnerships, and advocacy efforts, WCO aims to support custom operators in navigating a rapidly evolving agricultural landscape while maintaining a strong focus on safety and professionalism. 🇺🇸



**Steve Pesik, sales manager with Zimmrman Manufacturing, retired from the board of directors and was honored for his service.**

**Did you know?** About 10% of WCO members are based *outside of Wisconsin*. While we are deeply rooted in Wisconsin agriculture, other states are catching on and joining our movement.

To view the scholarship application, scan the QR code.



## WCO honors three scholarship winners; 2026 applications due May 1 By WCO



Wisconsin Custom Operators, Inc. (WCO) recently awarded three 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. Scholarship winners are required to have ties to 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,” says 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.”

The scholarship program continues to reflect WCO’s commitment to investing in the next generation of agricultural professionals. By supporting students with diverse career goals, the organization helps ensure the industry remains innovative, skilled, and well-prepared for the future.

**Mason Heise** of Marathon, Wis. was chosen to receive the \$1,500 Robert Hoerth Memorial Scholarship, which honors the late WCO Past President Robert Hoerth, who tragically passed away in early 2020. The scholarship is awarded to the most deserving applicant based on their alignment with the established criteria. Mason is studying precision agriculture at Fox Valley Technical College. Through his program,

he is gaining hands-on knowledge in installing, repairing, and operating precision technology used in modern agricultural equipment. After completing his studies, Mason hopes to join a custom harvest crew working throughout the Midwest to gain additional experience with large-scale operations and advanced technology. Ultimately, he plans to return to central Wisconsin to pursue a career as a precision agriculture technician, helping farmers optimize their equipment and achieve the best possible crop outcomes.

**Hailey Zernicke** of Cecil, Wis. received a \$1,000 scholarship. She is studying animal science at the University of Minnesota with strong ties to agriculture. Hailey hopes to build a career in the agricultural industry doing work that benefits farmers and rural communities. In the future, she envisions a role in her family’s dairy farm or in a role helping farmers with financial management and decision-making.

Zernicke has ties to WCO through Milk-n-More Harvesting LLC, who provides custom farming services to her family farm. She says the scholarship will help her continue her education while gaining experiences that support both her personal and professional growth.

**Izzy Dannenberg** of Mineral Point, Wis. received a \$1,000 scholarship. She currently attends Loras College studying creative media with plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in agricultural communications. Dannenberg hopes to focus her future career on digital communications and digital marketing within the agricultural industry. She is gaining experience through internships and industry opportunities while using social media and other digital platforms to communicate agricultural stories and

information to a wider audience. Izzy is the daughter of the owners of Triple D Farms.

**Applications for the 2026 WCO scholarship are being accepted through May 1.**

Interested students should visit <https://wiscustomoperators.org/about/scholarships.php> for more information including eligibility, criteria and application.

In 2026, 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 is open to any post-secondary training, including traditional college experiences and career-focused programs such as CDL truck driver training courses, pesticide applicator training programs/exams, or other industry-relevant certifications.

Individuals pursuing non-academic post-secondary education who are seeking career opportunities in the industry, such as joining a harvest crew or participating in an apprenticeship program, are also encouraged to apply. 🍷



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**Still time to register for the April 9 safety event!**

**WCO Safety training & certification session  
UW Agricultural Research Station, Arlington**

WCO and USCHI are hosting a safety training and certification event on Thursday, April 9, 2026, at the UW Agricultural Research Station in Arlington. This hands-on event will feature safety walk-arounds, breakout sessions focused on manure and forage equipment, and practical emergency response training. There is still time to sign up on the WCO website. *A special thank you to Agri-King, our "presenting" sponsor.*

This event is designed for your entire crew—a great opportunity to come together for a safety refresher before the 2026 season gets underway.

We look forward to seeing many crews at this event — as we come together to learn and promote safety. 🇺🇸

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**WCO mini-grants in action: tractor safety programs**

In addition to scholarships and other awards, WCO offers a mini-grant program designed to support projects that benefit the custom farming and broader agricultural communities. These flexible grants help bring innovative ideas to life and strengthen the industry at the local level.

WCO is committed to investing in people and practical programming. One example is our support of **five tractor safety courses across Wisconsin, including programs at the Food and Farm Exploration Center in Plover and Camp Tapawingo in Mishicot.** Through these courses, WCO is helping offset

costs for nearly 100 youth to learn safe tractor operation and basic first aid skills—building a safer next generation of agricultural workers.

Mini-grant applications are accepted on a rolling basis, with awards ranging from \$500 to \$5,000. Funding is available shortly after approval, with 50% distributed upfront and the remaining 50% provided with a final report.

Priority is given to projects that directly benefit the custom farming community, involve custom farmers or their clients, support student engagement, or emphasize safety, leadership, innovation, and community involvement.

The program is open to university and technical college faculty, staff, students, student organizations, and nonprofit organizations, as well as others deemed appropriate by the WCO Scholarship and Awards Committee.

Even small investments can make a meaningful difference, and WCO encourages members and partners to consider how this program could support ideas, events, or initiatives in their own communities.

To learn more or apply, visit [wiscustomoperators.org](http://wiscustomoperators.org) under the "About Us" tab, or contact [execdir@wiscustomoperators.org](mailto:execdir@wiscustomoperators.org).

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- Joseph Anderson**, Johnson Tractor Inc
- Rusty Bahl**, Rusty's Custom Chopping
- Larry Bomkamp**, Hennessey Implement
- Isaac Charboneau**, Floto Farms Inc.
- Jestin Danes**, JD Custom Field Services LLC
- Bill Ebler**, Apple Valley Agri
- Issiah Gerretsen**, Elusive Hill Dairy
- Adam Gruett**, Gruett's Inc
- Katherine Guither**, Kendall Guither Farms
- Dalen Haas**, Apple Valley Agri
- Adam Halopka**, Halopka Field Services LLC
- Shayne Hansen**, Elusive Hill Dairy
- Mitchell Hemann**, Elusive Hill Dairy
- Kipp Hinz**, Cows & Kilos LLC
- Griffin Holewinski**, Ryan's Farm Services LLC
- Isaac Hustad**, Cook's Countryside Trucking LLC
- Jake Katzman**, Katzman Farms Inc
- Ty Koehler**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Dalton Lauterbach**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Chris Louis**, Cook's Countryside Trucking LLC
- Aron Luchterhand**, Elusive Hill Dairy
- Dirk Luchterhand**, Elusive Hill Dairy
- Albert Martin**, Precision Applications LLC
- Adam Massart**, Pagel's Ponderosa Cropping
- Charlie Mlsna**, Sullivan Custom Farming
- Pipe Ag** (*new sponsor*)
- Zach Radloff**, Komro Sales and Service
- Ron Richards**, Cook's Countryside Trucking LLC
- Anthony Robinson**, Robinson's 24 Hr Custom Farming
- Aidan Schindler**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Zachary Schindler**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Ryan Schneider**, Holsum Dairies
- Derek Seibel**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Troy Strangstalien**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Keegan Vereide**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Joe Waldinger**, Cook's Countryside Trucking
- Brody Warthan**, Rihn Trucking LLC
- Ben Wegand**, Parkview Feeder Farms, Inc.
- Ryley Wussow**, Wussow Farms, LLC
- Taylor Yager**, Cook's Countryside Trucking

**Did you know?** In 2026, WCO experienced record membership!

## 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! 🇺🇸



*Erin Tomasik, Adam Massart, and Sheriff Matt Joski served on a panel at the recent symposium discussing collaboration between farmers, local officials, and communities to improve manure management and road use.*

## Beining wins \$1,000 grand prize!



Brian Beining won \$1,000 at the recent WCO annual meeting during Forage Symposium. Members were entered to win after completing the online member survey and Brian's name was chosen at random. Congrats Brian! 🇺🇸

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***Applications for the  
WCO Scholarship  
program are due  
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are considered!***

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[wiscustomoperators.org](http://wiscustomoperators.org)



**Questions about IoH/Ag CMV rules and  
permit applications?**

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*O'Leary Brothers Chopping Service, Janesville, Wis. Photo by Tracey Leeder*