

CUSTOMNews

Representing Custom Farming in Wisconsin | FALL 2020



Patricio Aguirre Saravia is a custom farmer in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He spoke at Forage Symposium in Feb. Photo by Tracey Leeder.

Professionalism, consistency focus of Argentinean farm business

By Mary Hookham for WCO



Patricio Aguirre Saravia of Buenos Aires, Argentina has built his custom farming business from the ground up using professionalism, hard work and consistency. His open mind and attitude of gaining knowledge to do better for his customers continues to serve him well.

"One of the most important lessons I've learned is that you have to work to be the best, but you don't have to be arrogant," Saravia said. "You must learn every day."

At the 2020 Symposium for the Midwest Forage Association, Wisconsin Custom Operators and Professional Nutrient

Applicators Association of Wisconsin, Saravia told his story of growing up on a farm near the small town of Carlos Casares in the northern part of Argentina. His family operated a dairy farm and a factory, and had an imported chopper that they used to make silage every year in December and again in April. During the summer months, the chopper sat idly so Saravia would travel to the central part of the country with the chopper every year to hire himself out for three months at a time.

He and his brother started the Duckas Group in 1983, which provided silage services to area farmers. This entrepreneurial adventure proved to be a successful, long-term business venture

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UPCOMING DATES:

WCO Mini-grant program
Accepted on a rolling basis

WCO board meeting
Dec. 3, via ZOOM

WCO virtual annual meeting
Jan. 27, 2021
9-10 a.m., via ZOOM

CONTACT WCO:

execdir@wiscustomoperators.org
(608) 577-4345



From the President's Cab

By Bryce O'Leary



Hello everyone, this fall certainly lends to the old adage if you don't like the weather, stick around and it will change. A year ago, everyone fought mud and more mud. This year started out in good shape with planting rolling along at a good pace.

Summer brought more good weather with hay crops getting done in good shape. Corn silage started out good in August, and then the Labor Day weekend came along and so did the rain. With all the good fortune this season, everyone started to think, "oh no, is this where the season goes south?" It seems that the last two years have made skeptics of us all.

After a few days the rain stopped, and September flew by with little time off. Now here we are in early November and harvest of corn and beans have moved at a good pace.

We are once again offering the Crew of the Year award, so think about how much your crew has made your business run well and nominate them.

By now everyone has heard the news that due to the pandemic, we will not be meeting in February in the Dells. It was with great trepidation that the board made this decision, and we hope that everyone will renew their memberships as our organization has made great strides to be recognized as a professional group.

I can attest to that as I was at a convenience store in South Wayne and ran into a legislator I have met with at the capital and he remembered me as one of the members from Wisconsin Custom Operators. Even here, your voice matters!

With that, I hope everyone has a safe rest of harvest. Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year. 🇺🇸

-Bryce

Policy center *issues to watch*

CFAP 2 due Dec. 11: Enrollment is now open for the second round of direct payments from the federal government under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to help offset losses caused by the pandemic.

USDA allows farmers to sign up for CFAP 2 online or through a local Farm Service Agency office until Dec. 11. Learn more and use the payment calculator at farmers.gov/cfap 🇺🇸

Ag related bills and stimulus hopefully included in possible lame duck session: Last spring, a package of ag bills to help rural Wisconsin passed the Assembly. These bills were ready for a Senate vote when the Coronavirus crisis led to adjournment of the Senate session. After the election, there is potential for these bills and any additional state ag stimulus to become part of a lame duck session before January. 🇺🇸

Welcome new members!

These individuals/sponsors joined WCO from July 2020 - Nov. 2020

Horning Manufacturing

Al Deaton, Deaton Nutrition

ROC Mergers by Eisentraut Ag Services

In-person Forage Symposium canceled

Unfortunately, like most events this year, the 2021 Forage Symposium has been canceled. MFA is going forward with a modified virtual conference, and you are welcome to attend. Read more about this decision on p. 4. 🇺🇸

WCO virtual annual meeting - Jan. 27

In order to hold elections and host our normal business meeting as required of our non profit status, WCO will host a virtual annual meeting on Jan. 27 from 9-10 a.m. Registration is open at wiscustomoperators.org. Please register in advance. 🇺🇸



Patricio

(continued from p. 1)

for both brothers.

Tim Everson of Insight FS in Waushara County appreciated Saravia's message of do your best and be adaptable to the times. Treating employees as consistently and considerately as possible was also a great lesson for everyone, he said.

"Don't just be status quo if you want to grow your business and work with customers," Everson said. "And your employees should know if they're going to get into this business, this is what the job description is but they will be taken care of well."

In 1987, the economy in Argentina was terrible and inflation rates were very high. Saravia's family struggled to keep their farm running but eventually decided the best option was to sell out. Saravia asked only for the New Holland chopper as payment during the sellout so he could continue hiring himself out for custom work. He was not given the chopper but had an opportunity to buy it at a judicial auction about a year later.

"I did not have the money, but most of my clients gave a hand and they lent me the money," he said. "My main client offered to give me work instead of money, so I planted his corn and then chopped it that summer."

Saravia hired himself out for nine months and lived in a hotel without his family. By the time he and his wife had their first son, Saravia was making enough money to rent a house closer to the farm where he was working. He was overjoyed to be able to have his family nearby.

"Keep your family with you no matter what," he said.

Although his brother passed away in 2006, Saravia has continued his family

business enterprise, now operating three custom farming services under the Duckas Group with a team of employees. He prides himself on setting a great example of professionalism for his employees to mimic every day.

"Because of our professionalism, we have the same customers from 37 years ago when we started our company," Saravia said. "I'm very proud of that."

After his brother passed, Saravia wasn't sure he could handle running the company that had gotten quite large for two people to operate. He reflected on what customers he could no longer work with but he quickly realized he couldn't drop anybody from his client list. Instead he had to learn to improve the company from the inside out to be more efficient and better able to manage such a large operation. He began making business investments and training his personnel and operators while continuing to be professional.

"Farming is different now," he said. "You have to be one step forward and on the lookout for what's coming. You have to look for a place for the next generations."

He has learned many lessons over the years that he works to share with his employees and simply take to heart as he plans for the future of his company. Taking responsibility for doing his best work at every farm is crucial for the success of his business, he said. Farmers will grow their operations if they trust the people working

for them.

For us, it is a big responsibility to do our best to be on time, correct and professional," Saravia said. "Each farmer grows if they have our service, and if the service is good, they grow more."

Farmer Kathy Vander Kinter of Green Bay found Saravia to be a very interesting speaker. She said she didn't realize how advanced the technology is in Argentina and was impressed by the custom services they offer, including infrared technology testing in their silage bags and on-site density checks.

"That's not something we hear a lot of the custom operators in our area going out and doing, so I guess I had this ignorant perception that maybe Argentina was a third-world country when actually we could probably learn some things from them," she said. 🇷🇺



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In-person Forage Symposium canceled for 2021

By WCO

After thoughtful consideration and discussion, the WCO, MFA and PNAAW boards made the difficult decision to cancel the in-person Forage Symposium that was scheduled for mid-February.

This is not a decision that was taken lightly because we know the Symposium is our premier networking opportunity that members and sponsors look forward to all year. At a time when public health and safety information is changing and evolving rapidly, we realized that canceling the event was the best decision for our organization – and for the safety of our members.

Because we can't duplicate the value of being together in-person with an online

event, the WCO board is not planning virtual content for the Forage Symposium. However, MFA is going forward with a modified virtual conference, and we encourage you to attend. WCO will not host our usual sessions as part of this virtual conference, but there is sure to be relevant content.

The WCO annual business meeting is traditionally held in conjunction with the Forage Symposium, and due to this change in format, **WCO will host our annual meeting on Wednesday, January 27 from 9 -10 a.m. in a virtual format using ZOOM.** All members will receive postcards and emails with log-in information. Ballots for board elections

will be mailed to all WCO voting members mid-December.

In the coming months, WCO will offer several short educational videos as well as opportunities to engage with our sponsors on our social media channels.

As we look forward, 2021 is an "on" year for the WCO Safety Certification educational event held in March. We are beginning to weigh our options for in-person and virtual formats. Jeff Ditzenberger is already scheduled and ready to offer a dynamic session about farmer mental health, building off of his talk at the 2020 Forage Symposium. We will keep you in the loop as plans are finalized.

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In closing, we are truly sorry that we will not be able to gather at Symposium, but WCO is committed to providing value to our members and sponsors. We ask that you renew your memberships and sponsorships for 2021 so that we can continue the important work of educating and advocating for the custom farming community. Renewals will be sent as normal in November. 🇺🇸

“ Because we can't duplicate the value of being together in-person with an online event, the WCO board is not planning virtual content for the Forage Symposium. ”



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Dr. Brian Luck, UW-Madison

**In 2021, WCO will elect
two operator directors:
SW Region and SE
Region**

Board nominations

WCO is looking for board of director nominations. Elections will take place at the annual meeting on Jan. 27, 2021, held in virtual format. Directors must be members of WCO and serve three-year terms with no more than two consecutive terms.

The board meets four times per year:

February - At Forage Symposium

March - At WCO Safety event or conf. call

July - At WI Farm Tech Days

December - Stand alone meeting

If you are interested in running or know someone who is, contact: execdir@wiscustomoperators.org or (608) 577-4345. 🇺🇸



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Join a committee

If you are looking for a small but important way to get involved, consider joining a committee:

- » *Education/Conference*
- » *Media*
- » *Scholarship & Awards*
- » *Safety/Regulations* 🇺🇸

WCO Annual Meeting and mail-in voting

The annual member meeting of the Wisconsin Custom Operators will be held Wednesday, Jan. 27 at 9 a.m. in virtual format.

The business meeting will include election of directors, committee reports and financial overview. All paid operator members may vote for directors.

Ballots will be mailed in advance to all voting members and **must be postmarked by Jan. 19** in order to be received by the meeting date.

Register for the annual meeting at wiscustomoperators.org. Log-in credentials will be emailed to you. 🇺🇸

Take care of physical and mental health

By Maria Woldt for WCO



As much as we want our work to be “business as usual” these days, it’s not. Farmers and custom farmers are essential workers, which means that that for most of us, the workload hasn’t diminished during quarantine. In some cases, it may have increased as you implemented additional safety measures.

Like virtually everyone, I’ve had neighbors, friends, service providers and extended family contract the virus. If you haven’t already, it’s time to take additional care – for you and the safety of your employees.

Some easy things to consider:

Sanitize: At the end of the day, wipe down your shop tables, door handles, refrigerator handles, time clocks and other equipment. If you have been working with tools, wipe them off with sanitizing wipes. If you cannot assign equipment to one person, make sure it is wiped clean in between operators. Encourage one operator at a time.

Minimize interaction: For your safety and theirs, keep client interaction to calls, texts or distanced/outdoor. If you must be in close proximity, wear a mask. Our own custom operator recently delivered some equipment and then called my husband on the phone to talk about the details. Ordinarily he would have stopped for a few minutes, but we are all keeping interaction to a bare minimum. For employees, if you must have a group meeting, make sure everyone is at least six feet apart and ideally outside. If you need to meet in the shop, encourage everyone to wear a mask.

Monitor employee’s health: Place hand sanitizer in high traffic areas and equipment cabs. Provide your staff with masks and encourage frequent hand washing. Make it clear to employees that if they are sick, even common cold symptoms, they should stay home until they feel better. It might be a good time to revisit your sick leave policy. Communicate any changes (even temporary changes) to your employees. If employees understand your policy, they are more likely to be honest and stay home when they are ill.

Take extra care of mental health

An ongoing study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that more than 50% of adults reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic. People are also reporting lack of sleep, poor diet and increased alcohol consumption. While it may have been ok at first, especially for introverts, ongoing social isolation has negative impacts on mental health.

Before the pandemic, farmer suicide had been on the rise. White, middle-aged males are at highest risk for suicide according to the Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Combine that with the reality that rural areas have less access to mental health resources, overall health factors are lower and rural populations make less money. A Johns Hopkins study found that

more people own guns in rural areas. Access to firearms means that a suicide attempt is more likely to be fatal. Most gun owners are male.

Coronavirus will negatively impact these already troubling realities. We have invited Jeff Ditzenberger back to offer an official QPR training as part of the WCO Safety Certification program this coming March. QPR stands for Question, Persuade and Refer — three simple steps anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Jeff’s message was well-received this past February.

In closing, we hope you continue to stay healthy and take additional care of your personal mental health as well as pay special attention to those around you. We will get through this together! 🇺🇸



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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 2021 membership. Sponsors can participate also. Simply list your company name on the "referred by" line and earn money towards your 2021 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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One of our favorite crews! Then-Packer Jordy Nelson joined the Arneson Custom Harvesting crew for a day.

Nominate your crew - Crew of the Year; Applications due Dec. 1

By WCO

Teamwork is critical during the harvest season. For custom farmers, pulling together, putting in the hours, supporting your crew and going the distance to complete the task at hand is what harvest is all about. It's tough to find good employees, and at the same time, there are men and women employed by custom farmers who make significant contributions to their crew.

WCO will honor an entire crew from a custom farming operation who demonstrate excellence in the areas of safety, efficiency, customer service, environmental stewardship, profitability and community engagement. This award is particularly focused on acknowledging and recognizing crew contributions that go above and beyond.

The decision to honor a "crew" versus an individual "employee" is based on the large emphasis custom farmers place on

crews or teams in their work culture.

The crew – made up of both full-time and part-time employees – of a WCO member – are eligible to participate in the annual award selection process. The winning crew will receive \$1,000 divided evenly among all members, as well as other prizes and apparel.

"This year has pushed us all to our limits. Farmers and custom farmers are essential workers and the pandemic has added extra precautions and safety measures to our already full plates," said Ray Liska, WCO vice president. "A good crew is worth their weight in gold and we want to show our appreciation for the many steadfast crews out there."

Applications for the WCO Crew of the Year Award will be accepted through Dec. 1. An entire crew will be honored. The person making the nomination does not have to be a member of WCO. That

means that farmers, clients of operators and fellow operators can all make nominations.

Visit wiscustomoperators.org and click the "about us" tab for more information including eligibility, criteria and application.

Don't forget about WCO's Mini-grant program!

New this year, WCO created 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 as a whole.

Awards range from \$500-\$5,000. Funding is available as soon as application is approved by the WCO Scholarship and Awards Committee.

To learn more and to download the application, go to wiscustomoperators.org and click the "about us" tab. 🇺🇸

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 of custom farmers in action. We do our best to feature multiple brands of equipment and diverse custom farming practices.

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



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“One of the most important lessons I’ve learned is that you have to work to be the best, but you don’t have to be arrogant, you must learn every day. ”

-Patricio Aguirre Saravia. Feature article on p. 1

To complete your no fee IoH/Ag CMV permit applications
(Required as of January 1, 2015), go to
wisconsin.gov and search “no fee ag permits”

Questions about IoH definitions and rules? Go to
wiscustomoperators.org/resources