

CUSTOMNews

Representing custom farming in Wisconsin and beyond | FALL 2025



WCO co-sponsored a tractor safety course at the Food+Farm Exploration Center in Plover, Wis. *Photos by F+FEC*

WCO supports youth tractor safety training for second year

By Maria Woldt and Brittany Marquard

Twenty-two students successfully completed the 2025 Tractor and Farm Safety Certificate Program hosted by the Food + Farm Exploration Center (F+FEC) in Plover, Wisconsin. The five-day course, led by F+FEC Education Program Manager Brittany Marquard, provided essential training in the safe operation of farm machinery and raised awareness of potential hazards to help prevent accidents and save lives.

For WCO, sponsoring this program for the second consecutive year represents a continued commitment to promoting safety, responsibility, and education among the next generation of agricultural workers. WCO members understand firsthand the importance of safety and

preparation in the field and supporting opportunities like this helps ensure that those values are passed on.

Farming is incredibly rewarding, but it also comes with real risks. Programs like the Tractor and Farm Safety Certificate Program help young people gain technical skills and a lifelong respect for machinery and a strong awareness of safe work practices. Investing in youth safety education is one of the most effective ways to support the future of Wisconsin agriculture and prepare young workers for success.

Throughout the week, students learned how to safely start, operate, and maintain tractors and other farm equipment. Lessons covered everything

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UPCOMING DATES:

WCO Fundraising Auction
Ends Tues. Dec.9
Online

Forage Symposium
Feb. 16-18, 2026
Chula Vista, Wis. Dells

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

CONTACT WCO:

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(608) 577-4345

Continued on p. 3

From the President's Cab: *Multiple opportunities to engage*

By John Osterhaus



I hope everyone had a safe and bountiful harvest season. As we wrap up another busy fall, it's encouraging to see that, for the most part, the weather was on our side. Harvesting was completed on time across the region, and the results of a productive growing season are now in storage or on their way to market. While the combines and choppers may be parked, our colleagues on the manure hauling side are still hard at work, nourishing next year's crop and helping ensure another successful season ahead.

As we shift from the rush of harvest to the planning season, WCO is busy preparing for one of our biggest annual events—the Forage Symposium, scheduled for February 16–18 in Wisconsin Dells. We are developing a program that will both educate and inspire. Speakers will entertain, share timely insights, and offer practical takeaways you can bring home to your own business.

This year marks an exciting milestone as

it's the first Forage Symposium since WCO and the Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin (PNAAW) formally affiliated. With this change, WCO will now coordinate the manure track sessions for the symposium. Our goal is to add even more value to that portion of the program—not only through

“As we move into the holiday season, I want to extend my thanks to all our members, partners, and sponsors for your ongoing support.”

high-quality manure management topics, but also by including regulatory content that benefits all members. We're confident this collaboration will make the symposium even stronger and more relevant to everyone in our industry.

While planning for the Forage Symposium is well underway, our team

is also preparing for the 2026 WCO Safety Training and Certification Session, scheduled for Thursday, April 9 at the UW Agricultural Research Station. This one-day event will include a mix of classroom-style sessions, hands-on equipment walk-arounds, and peer-to-peer discussions designed to strengthen safety awareness and reinforce best practices. The agenda will feature a few new sessions that we have not previously covered like how to make effective 911 calls and how to build a reliable first-aid kit.

Registration is open, and we're grateful to see strong sponsor involvement already. This event is one of the best opportunities to bring your whole crew together for safety training before the busy season begins.

As we move into the holiday season, I want to extend my thanks to all our members, partners, and sponsors for your ongoing involvement and support. Your participation makes WCO stronger and helps us continue to deliver value to members and the industry. I wish you and your families a safe, healthy, and enjoyable holiday season. 🇺🇸

– John

Vander Kinter Farms, Denmark, Wis.



Tractor safety (continued from p. 1)

from understanding power take-off (PTO) safety to recognizing blind spots and preventing roll overs. Participants also explored broader topics such as identifying farm hazards, understanding emergency procedures, and developing safe habits around livestock and chemicals.

The program concluded with a driving practicum, during which students demonstrated their ability to operate tractors through a series of real-world maneuvers. This hands-on test was the culmination of the week's training and a proud moment for both students and instructors.

In addition to machinery operation, students received instruction in hands-only CPR and Stop the Bleed, presented by Jenny Blenker, Aspirus Trauma Coordinator, and Hazel Packer of Amherst EMS. These lessons equipped participants with the tools to respond quickly and effectively in emergency situations—skills that are just as vital as safe equipment operation in farm environments.

"This program gives youth the skills and confidence to work safely on farms," said Marquard. "By investing in education, we are helping protect the next generation of agricultural leaders."

The 2025 Tractor and Farm Safety Certificate Program was made possible through generous sponsorships from the Mike Biadasz Farm Safety & Education Memorial Fund, WCO, Rural Mutual Zinda Insurance Group, Feltz Dairy Store, National Farm Medicine Center, Muzzy Broadcasting B104.9, and Riesterer & Schnell.

As part of the experience, Ken Feltz of Feltz Dairy Store hosted participants for



Above: In addition to machinery operation, students received instruction in hands-only CPR and Stop the Bleed training. Below: Ken Feltz of Feltz Dairy Store hosted participants for a behind-the-scenes farm tour.

a behind-the-scenes farm tour, where students explored a modern dairy farm and gained insight into how efficiency, animal care, and safety intersect in daily farm work.

Sponsorship of this program aligns closely with WCO's mission to promote professionalism, safety, and education within the custom farming industry. Each year, WCO offers training, resources, and networking opportunities to help members stay current on technology, regulations, and best practices. Supporting youth programs like this one ensures these same values take root early among future operators and farm employees.

As technology continues to advance, farms and equipment are becoming more sophisticated. Completing a basic tractor safety course often serves as the gateway to greater learning—whether as an employee on a farm or with a custom crew. By starting safety education

early, WCO and its partners are helping prepare the next generation to handle that technology responsibly and keep Wisconsin agriculture strong.

Through continued partnerships and community engagement, WCO remains dedicated to fostering a culture of safety—one student, one farm, and one season at a time. 🇺🇸



Mark your calendars for two big WCO events: Forage Symposium and Safety Training *By Maria Woldt for WCO*



Maria Woldt

As we head into the winter meeting season, WCO is gearing up for two major events that you won't want to miss — the Forage Symposium and the WCO Safety Training and Certification event, April 9 in Arlington. Both events promise valuable networking and practical information you can take home to your business.

Forage Symposium: Feb. 16–18, Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells

The 2026 Forage Symposium will feature a wide range of sessions including topics on building your social media presence, insurance, growing the ag workforce and more. On Tuesday, members will enjoy a keynote presentation from Avery and Emily Elsing of New Age Custom Farming in Prairie du Sac, Wis.



Avery and Emily Elsing will share their journey as young farmers and content creators. Photo by Emily Elsing.

This duo will share their experience growing their custom farming business alongside multiple other businesses and a growing online presence. The Elsing's have built a loyal following through their engaging YouTube channel, documenting real-life moments from the field, and offering an authentic look at what it takes to run a modern farm.

On Wednesday, we'll continue our popular "Forage harvesting around the country and world" theme with Matthias Siegrist of Siegrist Harvesting in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Born in Europe, Matthias will share his unique journey of moving across the world, starting a thriving business, and keeping his business running strong. He'll compare trends between U.S. and Canadian agriculture, touching on both the similarities and differences.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to ask Matthias about his extensive equipment fleet and learn how he manages logistics and efficiency.

This year marks



the first Forage Symposium since WCO's affiliation with PNAAW. With WCO now coordinating the manure track, attendees can look forward to expanded content that includes manure management, key regulatory updates, and safety topics that benefit all members.

Highlights from this track include two engaging panels: one featuring operators sharing "lessons learned" from manure hauling experiences to help others avoid costly mistakes, and another focused on building strong partnerships with town boards and community members while navigating manure hauling and application.

Whether you attend the Symposium every year or it's been a while, this is the perfect year to join us—there's truly something for everyone. More details on sessions, registration, and lodging will be released in the coming weeks. Registration opens in December, so keep an eye on your mail and email for updates.

Register for the April 9 safety event!



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

Following the Symposium, WCO and USCHI will host a stand-alone 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. Registration is now open on the WCO website, and sponsor support has been outstanding. *A special thank you to Agri-King, our "presenting" sponsor.* The full speaker lineup will be announced soon.

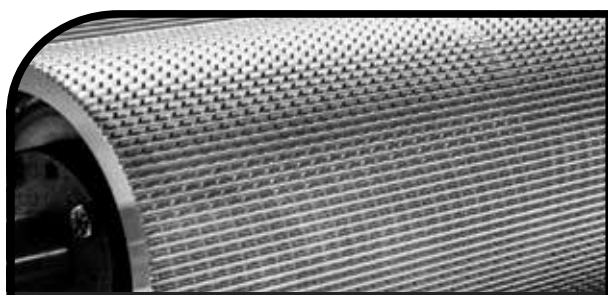
This event is designed for your entire crew—a great opportunity to come together for a safety refresher before the 2026 season gets underway.

We look forward to seeing everyone in February — and again in April — as we come together to learn, connect, and strengthen Wisconsin's custom farming community. 🇺🇸



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In 2026, WCO will elect:

- At-large operator director
- Northern region operator
- Corporate director

Board nominations & annual meeting

WCO is seeking board of director nominations. Elections will be held during the annual meeting at 8 a.m. on Feb. 18, 2026, at Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells. Directors must be WCO members and serve three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms.

The board meets 3-4 times per year:

February - At Forage Symposium

March (if needed) - At WCO safety event

July - At a member farm/shop

December - Stand alone meeting

If you are interested in running, contact Maria Woldt, executive director, at execdir@wiscustomoperators.org or (608) 577-4345.

Renew your membership or sponsorship

Membership renewals mail in early December with details to register for Forage Symposium. You can renew with your registration or directly with WCO—direct renewals by check or online are appreciated. Sponsorship renewals mail the week of Thanksgiving and must be paid directly to WCO. 🇺🇸

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- » Education/Conference
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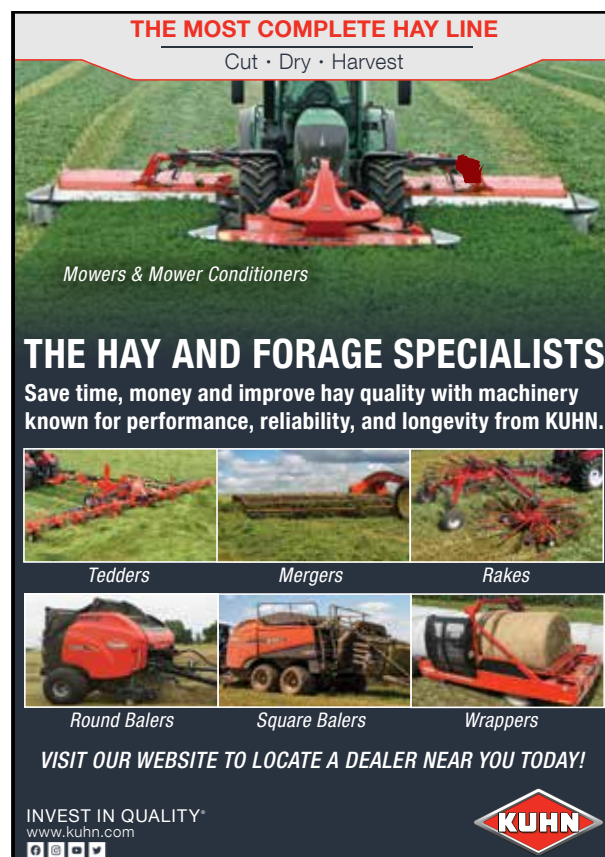
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Membership incentive program

Don't forget - WCO has a membership incentive program! If you sign up a new member you receive \$25 towards your 2026 membership. Sponsors can participate also. Simply list your company name on the "referred by" line and earn money towards your 2026 membership or sponsorship.

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

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Please send your photos to WCO

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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! 🇺🇸



Last winter, the WCO board toured the H&S Manufacturing plant in Marshfield, Wis. Board members enjoyed talking shop with the makers of their favorite equipment. Want to host a future tour? Contact us!

Jim Lilburn on Spectrum News



WCO member Jim Lilburn of Lilburn Farms in Evansville, Wis. recently welcomed Spectrum News 1 to ride along in his combine during corn harvest in Rock County. Each fall, Lilburn harvests for 10 area farmers, providing the equipment and expertise needed to get the job done efficiently. In his interview, Lilburn highlighted the cost of farm equipment as one of the key reasons many farmers turn to custom operators. The full segment aired on Spectrum News 1 and was featured online. 🇺🇸



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