

# CUSTOMNews

Representing Custom Farming in Wisconsin | **SPRING 2018**



Steve Breher of Kraus Custom Forage Harvesting in Elkhart Lake was honored as the WCO Employee of the Year at the 2018 Forage Symposium in the Dells.

## Steve Breher receives WCO's Employee of the Year Award

WCO recently honored an Elkhart Lake man for his hard work and dedication to a custom farming business.

WCO's 2018 Employee of the Year award was given to Steve Breher, an employee of Kraus Custom Forage Harvesting, on Feb. 21 during the organization's annual meeting at the Forage Symposium at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Breher has worked for Kraus Custom Forage Harvesting for 15 years, engaged in all aspects of harvesting, packing bunkers, merging hay, hauling silage and manure, maintaining and repairing equipment, and washing equipment during the winter.

"Steve has always been a very devoted employee, never asking for a day off during the busy harvest season," said Julie Kraus, who nominated Breher. "He is always willing to put in the extra hours needed to finish the customers

harvesting needs no matter what day of the week it is."

WCO created the Employee of the Year award to honor an exemplary employee who demonstrates excellence in the areas of safety, efficiency, customer service, environmental stewardship and profitability of a custom farming or custom harvest operation.

"Many of our members have had the same crew for several years. These employees are highly skilled and keep our businesses going during the height of the season," said Bryce O'Leary, WCO president, who presented the award. "Their commitment to safety, the environment and our clients is outstanding – and this award is our opportunity to honor them."

In addition to being a dependable and knowledgeable team member, Bill and Julie Kraus credit Breher's mellow demeanor and positive attitude as contributing factors to his outstanding

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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

WPS Farm Show  
March 27-29, Oshkosh, WI

WI Farm Technology Days  
July 10-12, Marshfield, WI  
Board Meeting - July 10

## CONTACT WCO:

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(608) 577-4345



# From the President's Cab

By Bryce O'Leary



Hello everyone, once again the board has elected me as President so that means I am writing another "letter from the cab".

The Symposium in February went very well. We had a good turnout of members and industry at the show.

After much discussion and consideration, we have decided to give our February date another year to determine if it's a good fit for the event. Please save the date for February 18-20, 2019 again at the Chula Vista.

I would like to thank Cole Olson from Diversified Farms LTD in Alma for his years of work and dedication while serving on the board. His perspective was appreciated, and he will be missed. Bill Smith from Smith Custom Farming in Darlington is the new board member this year for the south west region. We welcome Bill and look forward to hearing his ideas and working together in the years to come.

I would also like to congratulate Steve Breher from Krause Custom Forage Harvesting on being selected as our employee of the year. This award brings to light the hard work and dedication that is so important to our organization. Without dedicated employees, we would not be able to do the work that we do. As your season progresses, keep in mind any of your employees who are there really helping and making a difference for your company.

I would also like to thank all of the exhibitors and sponsors of our organization. As you are doing your winter and spring maintenance and repair projects, be sure to also thank any of the WCO sponsors you work with.

This year we will not be having our March business and safety program. The board felt this would be to soon after the Symposium to try to get everyone back together. If you attended the safety certified sessions at Symposium you will maintain your safety certification. Throughout the year there may be programs that you attend for safety or business development and if so, let us know so we can expand this program to meet your needs.

As the next season rapidly approaches, be sure your planning includes those contingencies that you never expect. I hope everyone has a safe and successful year and look forward to the next time we meet. 🇺🇸

-Bryce

## Employee of the Year (continued from p. 1)

safety record, always maintaining a level-head and awareness of his surroundings.

"He has great customer relationships, working hand in hand with them to get the job done efficiently and on time," said Bill Kraus during the award presentation.

Applications are collected for WCO's employee of the

year in the fall and the winner is announced at the group's annual meeting in February. Members are encouraged to nominate those employees who set a positive example for their entire crew.

If you know of a deserving applicant please consider nominating him or her. 🇺🇸

## Welcome new members!

The following list represents individuals/sponsors who joined WCO from November 2017 - March 2018

Eric Argall  
Bob Armstrong  
Steven Breher  
Ron Breunig  
Patrick Campbell  
Cody Eastman  
Graham Giese  
Jim Hahn  
Rich Halvorsen  
Brent Hogan  
Jason Hoesly  
Josh Kinjerski  
Mike Larcheid  
Aarick Lawstuen

Joe Miritz  
Brad O'Brien  
Dustin Oesau  
Patrick Passmore  
William Reed  
Ben Schams  
Jed Schnitzler  
Charlie Schultz  
Dave Schultz  
Calvin Sipes  
Keeston Sorenson  
Brian Sullivan  
Paul VanDe Walle



Steve Breher of Kraus Custom Forage Harvesting

WCO members select directors, officers

WCO members selected two new directors and officers during the annual meeting at the Forage Symposium Feb. 21 at the Chula Vista Resort.

Bill Smith, owner of Smith Custom Farming in Darlington, was newly elected as an operator director. Bryce O’Leary, owner of O’Leary Brothers Chopping Service LLC in Janesville, was re-elected for his second term as an operator director and also as the group’s president. Ray Liska, owner of Apollo Vale Enterprises, was elected as vice-president.

In addition to Smith Custom Farming, Smith also farms 2,000 acres of grain in the Darlington area. Smith is a member of Midwest Forage Association, Lafayette County Farm Bureau, National Federation of Independent Business and he supports local FFA and 4-H activities. Smith Custom Farming has a strong presence on social media with more than 2,000 people following their Facebook page. Smith and his wife, Jamie, have two

sons: James (12) and Frankie (4).

O’Leary has been active in WCO since the early days of the organization and was first elected to the board in 2015. With a passion for safety and policy, O’Leary was among WCO’s first group of Safety Certified operators. He has also chaired the Safety and Regulations Committee since 2016. In addition to his work with WCO, O’Leary has served on his town board and was a town supervisor for six years. He also served nine years on the Rock County FSA board including seven years as chair. O’Leary holds a degree in agriculture education from the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

Liska owns and operates Apollo Vale Enterprises and custom raises poultry for Gold’n Plump Farms. He was very active in FFA and is a 10-year member of Wisconsin Farm Bureau where he has served as young farmer chairman, membership chairman, voting delegate, and is a proud a graduate of the Farm Bureau Leadership Institute.

Liska was elected to the WCO board in 2017.

Liska replaces Cole Olson of Diversified Farms LTD in Alma.

Corporate representative Chuck Rabitz of Denmark State Bank in Denmark was re-elected as Treasurer and corporate representative Josh Bartholomew of Oxbo International in Clear Lake was re-elected as secretary. Retiring board member Cole Olson of Diversified Farms LTD in Alma was honored for his service to WCO.

In 2019, elections will take place to for a corporate and at-large operator position. To be eligible for a corporate seat on the board, an individual must be employed by a WCO sponsor or must be an associate member.

Operator board members must be a general member in good standing. An At-large director may be from any region in Wisconsin. The person may also be from outside Wisconsin. Please contact WCO if you re interested in running for a spot on the board.



The 2018-2019 board of directors

## Meyer Manufacturing: Adapting to change

By Whitney Beahr, WCO Communications

Founded in 1944 by Alvin Meyer, Meyer Manufacturing Corporation has thrived in Dorchester, Wisconsin. The original business was centered around equipment repairs and manufacturing snow plows, farm wagons, grain elevators, truck racks, fork lifts and mobile homes. In 1951, Alvin Meyer patented a false-gate forage box and redesigned the box into what is believed to be the first self-unloading forage box ever. Over the years, the business has expanded and Alvin's children, Don, Larry and Judy joined the business.

So how is business looking for Meyer Manufacturing today? Things are going well: Equipment from Meyer Manufacturing can be found across the world in Central America, Europe, Australia, Russia and Japan, though

their focus is on the United States and Canada. Meyer equipment can be found wherever the dairy industry exists, and more recently where the beef industry exists. Meyer Manufacturing has seen good growth throughout the years and has added three big additions to their facilities in the past five years. They have also expanded their business to include TMR Mixers and Vertical Mixers to their previous line-up of manure spreaders, forages boxes and accompanying accessories.

"Many people questioned why we got into that product line [TMR Mixers] since there is a lot of competition, but we thought with our name recognition we could get into the market place," says Larry Meyer, vice president of Meyer Manufacturing. "The TMR Mixer and Vertical Mixer have been

nice products for us and allowed us to expand our business to include the beef industry."

Meyer Manufacturing's products and growth have had a direct correlation with the changes in farming over time.

"Custom operators are the innovators in the agriculture industry," Larry says. "Operators want the newest, biggest and fastest equipment, and trade regularly to keep their equipment reliable."

With this trend, Meyer Manufacturing has made it their priority to have a wide variety of equipment to fit the needs of not only custom operators, but of all farming needs across the world.

As Meyer Manufacturing likes to say, "Farm equipment buyers trust the name Meyer!" 🇺🇸



## Attracting the millennial employee

By Whitney Beahr, WCO Communications, as published in Hay and Forage Grower magazine



*Whitney Beahr*

Finding and retaining employees is one of the many challenges agriculture employers face today.

In some cases, this means a lack of people in general, and in others, it's a lack of young people who want the jobs available.

Millennials – or people born between 1982 and 2004 – have much different expectations when it comes to their ideal jobs. To attract young, educated people, employers must step up their game and offer better pay, benefits, training – and quality of life.

One such employer is Meyer Manufacturing in Dorchester, Wis. Meyer Manufacturing has taken proactive measures to recruit employees by increasing starting wages along with increasing the number of vacation days and allowing employees to accumulate vacation days from year to year.

However, even with revamping their benefits, Meyer Manufacturing still struggles to recruit employees. So, the critical question is: what can agriculture employers do to make their job opportunities more attractive, especially to the younger generation?

### Non-traditional background

Even in rural areas, many millennials do not come from a farm or have traditional agriculture experience.

“Having limited or no farm experience, young people are not accustomed to the prospect of potentially working 12-16 hour days, seven days a week, and working until the job gets done,” says Randy Tenpas, Agriculture department chair for Fox Valley Technical College

in Appleton, Wis.

When employees are hired to work for custom operators and agriculture employers, they are often surprised by the long hours and demanding schedule. Larry Meyer, vice president of Meyer Manufacturing, commented that they have had several employees resign after working just a few weeks on the job.

To reduce miscommunication of job expectations, employers need to help



**Meyer Manufacturing headquarters in Dorchester, Wis.**

potential employees understand what is expected. This can be accomplished by creating detailed job descriptions that fully explain and document the job requirements and expectations.

Young people coming out of school are very focused on “job fit” and by listing the expectations, potential employees can better understand the job and what would be required of them.

New employees also need to be trained to achieve success in their job. If they aren't fully trained there is a higher chance that they will become discouraged and ultimately leave the job.

“We can't put new employees into the workplace without proper training,” says Tenpas. “Agricultural employers need to help employees understand what needs to be accomplished.”

### Different expectations

In addition to changes in where young people are coming from, there have also been major changes in the types of jobs they find attractive. Millennials value quality of life more than any other generation. This concept can be hard for the agriculture community to grasp because as mentioned before, the agriculture mind-set is to work until the job gets done.

Recent college graduates are looking for employment opportunities that provide a good salary with benefits and an opportunity for career growth. Tenpas added that the median annual salary for Wisconsin Technical College System graduates with an associate degree is \$37,440. Many graduates are also looking for benefits that include health insurance, 401K, and paid time off.

Some custom operators have found their own approaches to keeping reliable employees.

“We have an exceptional group of guys working for us right now,” says Travis Erickson, an owner of Four Star Ag located in Neillsville, Wis. “We've had many of the same employees for several years now, and I couldn't be more pleased with them. It takes a lot of good help to keep ahead of the game in farming. I can't thank my employees enough because without them, this operation wouldn't be possible.”

So what's the secret to keeping an exceptional group of employees? Erickson mentions that he allows his employees to keep a flexible schedule.

*Continued on page 6*



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## Millennial employees *(continued from p. 5)*

“Many of our employees have young families and if they want to leave early to go to their children’s event, I’m okay with that. Kids only grow up once, and I want my employees to enjoy family time,” he says.

“We are also trying to improve the quality of life on our operation,” Erickson says. “We do a lot more split shifts during our seasons. I’m also a big believer that if we can get enough work done during the week, we don’t need to work on the weekends.”

During their busy times, they may have to work weekends to get the crops in, but Erickson says they probably only work six or seven weekends throughout the year.

Along with good job descriptions and improving quality of life, agriculture employers can increase their chances of finding good people by working with school-aged

children and their parents.

To help promote careers in agriculture, Tenpas suggests that employers work with middle and high school counselors and staff. Employers should also continue to work with technical colleges and university agriculture programs to sponsor and/or provide education scholarships for students.

For example, Meyer Manufacturing visits local high schools to help promote careers in welding.

“There are good paying jobs [in Dorchester],” says Larry Meyer. “We encourage students who are interested in welding and tech programs to attend technical college and work locally. We let students know that there are many jobs available in rural communities and they don’t need to move to bigger cities to find work.”



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Travis Erickson (right) values his employees by implementing flexible schedules and split shifts. Ryan Shaw (left) is one of Erickson’s long-term employees.

## Adding value and keeping accounts current: WCO members speak at Symposium

By Maria Woldt for WCO

Custom farmers were the focal point of the Forage Symposium this past February at our annual conference in Wisconsin Dells.

The event, co-hosted with the Midwest Forage Association, continues to be one of the premier conferences for the custom farming and forage community. In addition to the ever-popular equipment and research discussions, this year we focused on member-centric topics relevant to the present farming economy.

The presentation, “Collections: Keeping accounts current in a depressed farm economy” featured Bill Arneson of Arneson Custom Harvesting in Barneveld; Kathy Vander Kinter of Vander Kinter Farms in Green Bay; Chuck Rabitz of Denmark State Bank in Denmark; and Blake Knickelbein of Twohig Rietbrock Schneider & Halbach in Chilton.

The panel provided personal experiences and tangible legal solutions that can help operators collect on balances due – or avoid the situation all together.

“Communication is really key,” said Kathy Vander Kinter. “We have meetings in the winter with our clients to go over what both parties can expect in the coming year.”

Much like a farmer must know their cost of production, Chuck Rabitz emphasized the importance of operators knowing their “burn rate”. In other words - what you can afford to ‘not collect’ and still pay your bills.

Both Vander Kinter and Bill Arneson agreed that it’s not realistic to have written contracts with all clients. However, large accounts that make up a significant percentage of a custom business should negotiate a contract from year to year.

“Most legal action to recoup open receivables will require written contracts,” said Blake Knickelbein. “If a client declares bankruptcy, it’s a race to get in line to get paid”



L to R: Dave Eisentraut, Kale Monroe, Seth Berg and Adam Danzinger speaking about value-added custom farming operations.

Knickelbein also talked about becoming a secured creditor if a client declares bankruptcy. Finally, he talked about logistics associated with a threshers lien.

To avoid leveraging their entire business on one service and in an effort to retain good employees, many custom operators have diversified their businesses.

The presentation, “Value-added operations: Additional services to boost your business model” featured Seth Berg of Seth’s Crop & Shop in Cecil; Kale Monroe of Hageman Monroe Custom Farming in Castalia, Iowa; Dave Eisentraut of Eisentraut Ag Services in Waldo; and Adam Danzinger of CLAAS of America served as moderator.

Seth Berg explained how adding steers, heifers and becoming a partner in a neighboring dairy has allowed him to spend more time with his family. Something that he struggled to do with a busy custom farming business and 42 employees.

“I entered the dairy as a secured creditor, and it is working out well for us,” he said. “This is now our future plan.”

Adding seed sales to his custom

farming business was done out of necessity said Kale Monroe. Many of his clients in Iowa hire him to do all field work, planting and harvesting, so it made life much easier if he could also provide seed to his clients. By offering additional services, his clients have one less supplier to work with and he doesn’t have any delays, plus he knows and trusts the products he offers.

For Dave Eisentraut, having a full-service operation is more sustainable.

“This is a change from 10 years ago. There were lots of operators who were more concerned with how many acres they could cover,” he said. “We invest in our customers as much as we can. Now it’s all about the relationship, you are their partner.”

All panelists agreed that their businesses have evolved in order to show clients that they are here to help farmers succeed. Operators that are very valuable to their customers will continue to thrive.

To watch the Facebook live recording of the panel on value-added custom farming operations, go to [Facebook.com/WisconsinCustomOperators](https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinCustomOperators). 🇺🇸

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## Membership incentive program

Don't forget - WCO has a membership incentive program! If you sign up a new member and they list your name on the paper application or online, you receive \$25 towards your 2018 membership. Sponsors can participate also. Simply list your company name on the "referred by" line and earn money towards your 2018 sponsorship.

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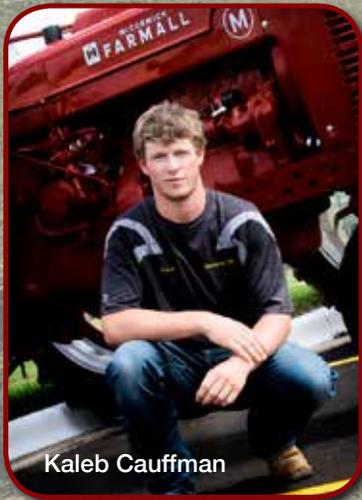
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## SUPPORTING EDUCATION



Kaleb Cauffman



Jacob Krause

### WCO announces scholarship winners; 2018 applications due May 1

The 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 for the future. 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 \$1000 scholarship.

“WCO understands that the foundation for the continued success of Wisconsin’s agricultural economy depends on a well-educated workforce,” says Dr. Kevin Shinnars, chair of the WCO Scholarship Committee and professor of Biological Systems Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“We also recognize that the high-cost of additional education can impact this need.”

Winners of the 2017 WCO scholarships include: Kaleb Cauffman,

Fennimore; Jacob Kraus, Elkhart Lake; and Rachel O’Leary, Janesville,

Applications for the 2018 WCO scholarship are currently being accepted and are due May 1. Interested students should visit [www.wiscustomoperators.org/about\\_us/scholarships.php](http://www.wiscustomoperators.org/about_us/scholarships.php) for more information including eligibility, criteria and application. Again this year, WCO will offer three (3) \$1,000 scholarships.

#### **Meet the winners:**

**Kaleb Cauffman** of Fennimore is a freshman at South West Technical College, majoring in ag mechanics. Kaleb plans to use his degree to develop technical skills in the operation, maintenance and repair of agriculture equipment, to improve his crop production skills, and overall farm management skills. He is the son of WCO member Cauffman’s Slurry Transfer.

**Jacob Krause** of Elkhart Lake is a freshman at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, majoring in mechanical engineering. In high school he was

very active in athletics, community volunteering and the robotics team. His interest in robotics teamed with forage harvesting experience helping with his parents’ custom harvesting business, led him to pursue engineering as a career. He is the son of WCO member Kraus Custom Forage Harvesting

**Rachel O’Leary** of Janesville is a third-year vet student at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM). In vet school, students study everything from “goldfish to giraffes”. In order to remain connected to food animal medicine, Rachel serves as co-president for both the bovine and pig clubs. She also had the chance to represent the UW SVM in Washington D.C. to lobby legislators on the importance of the Higher Education Act and the Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program Enhancement Act. She is the daughter of WCO member O’Leary Brothers Chopping Service. Please join WCO in congratulating these outstanding young professionals! 🇺🇸

Background photo of Jacob Krause merging hay. Photo by Julie Krause.



Rachel O'Leary



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“ 10 years ago it was about how many acres we could cover. Now, we invest in our customers as much as we can with added services. It’s all about the relationship, you are their partner. ”

-Dave Eisentraut, Eisentraut Ag Services

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