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Follow the wheat harvest with Sammons Adventures



Photos by Sage Sammons.

By Sage Sammons

Some people think being a “wheaty” is a bad thing. I am a complete opposite. A wheaty is a hardworking, fun-loving, family-oriented person who works hard in the field with the goal of feeding America. Above all else, they are a custom harvester.

I am a custom harvester and have been one since I was a freshman in high school. This summer, however, will be a different experience for me. I was born and raised on a farm in Montana, and then one summer out of the blue, my dad started a custom harvesting business. I volunteered because of the giant adventure that awaited me.

This year I take on a new adventure. I will be writing about my experiences to give you and my friends a better idea of what harvest really is. I will be one of three correspondents writing for the *High Plains Journal*/*Midwest Ag Journal*'s All Aboard Wheat Harvest. This is a print and online collaboration that will follow my journey through articles, pictures and some videos. All Aboard Harvest is sponsored by *High Plains Journal* and DuPont Crop Protection.

My love for harvest came early in my life. I can vividly remember my first harvest memory. I was sitting on my grandfather's lap in our John Deere combine, because the buddy seat wasn't invented yet. I was mesmerized by the header and all the moving parts but was widely advised by my parents to not get too close. But what really made me fall in love with harvest was the smell.

The smell of harvest, to me,



Sage Sammons

represents a job well done—an end to a hard working year. But most of all, harvest is the smell of my summers for as long as I can remember. Since our company is pretty young, I haven't been absolutely drenched in harvest, but I sure learned quickly about the lifestyle and the work ethic you need to be a custom harvester.

I am older now and currently a student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am studying communications and planning on furthering my education by attending graduate school. At school I am the sports editor of the school paper, the *UNLV Rebel Yell*, so covering a lifestyles topic such as harvest will be new to me. My roots have been based on our farm, but my father has given me the liberty to chase my dreams. Though he always reminds me there is a place on the farm for me.

Speaking of my dad, Roger Sammons, he always dreamed about going south and making the

Sammons Adventures taking a break at the edge of a field.



harvest run. My dad owns his own farm in Cut Bank, Mont., and has met many of the harvesters during their stops in Montana. One of his friends he met was Jim Campbell. Through the years, they always stayed in contact, and in 2004 Jim told my dad about an opportunity to go south. That was the birth of Sammons Adventures.

This will be Sammons Adventures' sixth year on the run and personally my fifth. We have harvested in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota and Montana but have never had the same run

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—Sage Sammons,
High Plains Journal correspondent

Section B

MIDWEST AG
JOURNALTM
An Edition of High Plains Journal

May 24, 2010

Working for wages

While working in the yard last weekend, my neighbor's 10-year-old son stopped by, wearing a coonskin cap and carrying his toy rifle. He had been "scouting" but was bored with that activity, so he asked if he could work for me. I had nine bags of mulch that needed to be put down, so I asked him what he'd take to help spread it in the flowerbed. "I'll do it for a dollar an hour," he said boldly. "OK," I said, "let's get started."

In that exchange, he validated himself and took me back to his age, when I was eager to be paid for work. It really wasn't about the money but about the value someone associated with me. I think we have lost that today, as children are rarely told that they are anything other than a liability. A family is a unit only when everyone contributes to the well-being of the group. Our grandparents had children mostly because they needed labor on the farm and care in their old age. A child learned to work, saw the value of his or her deeds and developed a sense of responsibility and respect. Along with love, compassion and awareness of God, I don't think you can improve on that concept.

As I cut open the bags and spread them around so my 10-year-old hired man could do the fine work of placing handfurs under bushes and against curbs, he said, "I think I want a dollar a minute." This shocked and amused me, as he

really had no sense of the value of a dollar. Wow, have I heard that line a few times in my life! I told him his rate was a little high, but I would pay him two dollars an hour. He smiled brightly and agreed. On the job for 10 minutes and he's already gotten a 100-percent raise.

Every generation beats up the next one with how low our wages were compared to what they expect to make. We imply that we worked harder for less, and that was more honorable. The reality is that I worked for farmers who felt the wages they paid the hired man were too high. In the days of hauling hay by hand the rate was 1.5 cents per bale, and the hourly wage was \$1.25. The farmers couldn't get enough help at that rate, so they reluctantly upped it to 2 cents or \$1.50. When I headed to college, the younger kids wouldn't work for that price. In fact, most wouldn't haul hay at all. The round baler was popular, so it was the alternative. Farmers realized they could use capital and mechanization to solve their labor problems. People who had lectured me about how important it was to put alfalfa inside and made me stack it in decrepit buildings—from chicken houses to the peaks of 19th-century barns—were now storing round bales on the ground, exposed to the weather. I'm still angry about that one.

When I turned 18, I had opportunities to work for more money than farmers would pay. I became

a "casual laborer" for a unionized trucking company, working the night shift. They made me sign a form but waived the union dues and put me on a loading dock, and I made the astounding rate of \$5.18 per hour. The foremen pushed for us to load quickly, but the regulars told me to do it right and to do it at a sustainable pace. Some nights we'd work for eight hours, and some nights we'd sweep the dock after we had run out of work but needed to stay to finish out our shift. I received paychecks that shocked a farm kid, but I hated the faceless monotony of the job. I went back to college looking for something more fulfilling in life.

We wrapped up the mulching project in about 20 minutes, and I sat down with my young helper. I told him that he'd earned a dollar for that length of time. He put it in his pocket without much fanfare. I told him to show it to his parents and tell them what we'd agreed upon and that he'd been paid for his work. I used to enjoy getting my paycheck from the people who employed me, especially farmers. It was a validation and a bit of a ceremony. "What are you going to



do with it?" was often the question when I was paid. "I'm saving for college," was my answer, and that seemed to please them. I then took the check home and showed it to my mother. She would have me endorse it, and she'd put it in the college account. It meant a great deal to a depression-scarred woman to know that the next generation was building financial security.

I didn't hold true to all her values. I did get my education from the savings I generated from farm work and a small cow herd that was dispersed by the time I graduated, but I plunged into debt to buy homes and cars and all the items of the consumer era. I always kept a job to pay the interest and the principal and to keep my head above water.

The work ethic was instilled, and the result has been a lifetime of great satisfaction. I hope that dollar to my helper started him on the pathway to self-worth, even though it won't increase his net worth very much.

Editor's Note: Ken Root is an independent agricultural journalist. He was named the 2009 Farm Broadcaster of the Year and was the 2008 winner of the Oscar in Agriculture. He is an Oklahoma native and an experienced print, radio and television journalist. He has spent the last five years as Lead Farm Broadcaster at WHO Radio in Des Moines, Iowa. He and his wife Gail have two adult children and two grandchildren.

All Aboard Wheat Harvest . . .

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two years in a row. That will be no different this season, as the weather always plays a factor in where and when we will cut. This season we will start outside of Wichita Falls, Texas.

We literally bleed red on harvest, as the colors of our machines are red. We have four 8120s, a Case tractor to pull our red grain cart and three Kenworth W-900s, a Kenworth T-800 and a Peterbilt 359 that all match Case I-H red.

As a crew we are 11 strong, my dad as the boss, four truck drivers, four combine operators, a grain cart operator and, of course, the cook. Through the course of the year, I will introduce everyone

and talk a little bit about where he or she comes from and why he or she came on harvest.

As a crew we work hard, but we also play hard. I will tell stories of our times not only on the daily grind but also away from it if we get a rain day. In the past we have taken in tourist points around the areas we have been cutting and even have gone to a few baseball games. Every day is a new adventure, whether we are working or not.

I look forward to a year of fun and hard work, but more importantly to the reader, I look forward to sharing my experience of harvest this season with the world of the *High Plains Journal*.

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AUCTION CALENDAR Schedule of Forthcoming Auctions



Date/Time/2010	Location	Auction Co.	Phone
May 22, 8 AM	Weatherford, OK	Divine Finds Estate Sales	580-890-0375
May 22, 9 AM MST	Byers, CO	Linnebur Auctions, Inc.	303-822-9298
May 22, 10 AM	Cushing, OK	Pickens Auction	405-747-9304
May 22, 10 AM	Walters, OK	Bridges Auction & Sales Co.	580-492-5260
May 22, 10 AM	Buffalo, OK	Smith & Co Auction & Realty, Inc.	580-994-6004
May 24, 10 AM (Land)	Medicine Lodge, KS	United Country/Nixon Auction & Realty	620-886-1701
May 25 (Land)	Fairview, OK	Wiggins Auctioneers	580-233-3066
May 26 (Land)	Burlington, OK	Wiggins Auctioneers	580-233-3066
May 25, 10 AM CDT	www.purplewave.com	Purple Wave Auction	866-608-9283
May 26, 8:30 AM CST	Marion, SD	Wieman Land & Auction Co.	800-251-3111
May 26, 10 AM CT	www.bigiron.com	Stock Auction Co.	800-937-3558
May 26, 10 AM CT	www.purplewave.com	Purple Wave Auction	866-608-9283
May 27 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
May 27 (Land)	Lahoma, OK	Wiggins Auctioneers	580-233-3066
May 27, 10 AM (Land)	Guymon, OK	United Country/Lippard Auctioneers	580-237-7174
May 27, 11 AM (Land)	Anthony, KS	Gene Francis & Associates	316-524-8345
May 29, 10 AM	Haven, KS	Van Schmidt Auctioneer/Realtor	620-367-3800
May 29, 12 Noon (Land)	Pocasset, OK	Harryman Realty & Auction	405-381-4744
June 1, (Land) bidding ends	Stevens Co, KS	Faulkner Real Estate	866-365-2243
June 1, (Minerals) bidding ends	Stevens/Morton Co, KS	Faulkner Real Estate	866-365-2243
June 2 (Land)	Breckenridge, OK	Wiggins Auctioneers	580-233-3066
June 2, 8 AM	Tulsa, OK	Enlow Tractor Auction	800-779-3924
June 2, 10:30 AM CDT (Land)	Plainville, KS	Farm & Ranch Realty, Inc.	800-247-7863
June 2, 1 PM (Land)	Meade, KS	Kirk Bros. Auctioneers	620-826-3386
June 3 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
June 3, 1 PM MT (Land)	Syracuse, KS	Carrithers Auction & Real Estate	620-492-2329
June 4, 9:30 AM	Cordell, OK	Hinz Auctioneers	580-774-4644
June 5, 10 AM (Land)	McPherson, KS	Triple K Auction & Real Estate	620-386-0650
June 8, 10 AM CST	Williston, ND	Zachmann Auction Service	701-774-0957
June 8, 10:30 AM CDT (Land)	Sharon Springs, KS	Farm & Ranch Realty, Inc.	800-247-7863
June 8, 10:30 AM CDT (Land)	Oakley, KS	Homeland Realty & Auction	785-462-8255
June 9, 9 AM	Great Falls, MT	AgCo Finance LLC	303-898-8102
June 9, 10 AM	Howe, TX	Southwest Auctions	903-532-5501
June 7, 9 AM	Sikeston, MO	DeWitt Auction	800-533-9488
June 10 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
June 11, 11 AM (Land)	Tecumseh, OK	Williams & Williams	918-361-9436
June 11, 1:30 PM (Land)	Henryetta, OK	Williams & Williams	918-361-9436
June 11, 4 PM (Land)	Sapulpa, OK	Williams & Williams	918-361-9436
June 12 (Land)	Union City, OK	R & R Auctions	405-352-5200
June 14, 9 AM	Clinton, MO	Cook Auction	800-769-5823
June 15, bidding ends (Land)	Hamilton Co, KS	Carrithers Auction & Real Estate	620-492-2329
June 16	Shattuck, OK	Bill E. Newman R/E LLC	580-338-3823
June 17 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
June 24 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
June 25 (Internet only)	www.ironplanet.com	Iron Planet	888-433-5426
June 25-26, 9 AM (Land)	Pueblo, CO	Ashcraft Auction	719-740-2537
June 25, 10 AM	Sherman, TX	Catching Brothers Auctions	903-868-3132
July 5, 9 AM	Sikeston, MO	DeWitt Auction	800-533-9488
July 7, 8 AM	Tulsa, OK	Enlow Tractor Auction	800-779-3924
July 14, 10 AM	Howe, TX	Southwest Auctions	903-532-5501
July 17, 9 AM	Burlington, KS	Harley Gerdes Auctions	785-828-4476

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