



Hans Herkert: PCA Career is Rewarding and Fulfilling

By Rachel Taft

Hans Herkert, along with Joe Malm and Gary Silveria, recently provided CAPCA staff with a field tour in Yolo County. During the tour he shared helpful career insights, a clear commitment to the success of agriculture and an ability to articulate the PCA profession in a way that would be accessible to a non-industry audience. In a follow-up interview, Hans explained what he does as a PCA: “I work with growers to maximize the health of their crops. The job of PCAs is not unlike what a doctor and nutritionist are for humans. We help formulate plant and soil nutritional programs. We also provide recommendations (think medical prescriptions) to treat insect and disease infestations. We use an integrated approach to ensure that resistance does not develop to our plant protections materials (think medicine) and to promote bio-diversity.”

Personal experience at an early age (his first job around 12 years old was shoveling horse manure in a neighbor’s pasture for \$20 per week) gave Hans a passion for agriculture and a satisfaction in the work. “I had decided on a career in agriculture around the age of 10 [and] to become a PCA during my second year of college. I knew this profession was a good fit for me because of my passion for crop production and my desire to interact within the agricultural community... Seeing your time and effort pay off in the form of successful harvests [is] the main highlight... I enjoy the fact that my office is the valley farmland that I grew up in.”

When asked what he would share with newer PCAs or things he wished he’d known sooner, Hans replied, “[T]ake advantage of the great opportunity in front of you. Know that your reputation is all you have, in this career especially. Your reputation in the industry will begin forming before your first day at work. Seek to build your reputation as someone who is reliable, hard-working (especially on Sunday afternoons), and professional. Also, build skills in communicating and collaborating with people. This will help the work flow go well and will help you have fun while you work. Your employers and customers will value your work ethic and personability as much as they will your technical knowledge.”

And to college students interested in the career Hans advises, “[It’s] a great career path, one that can be very rewarding and fulfilling. Make sure it is what you want to do. Don’t buy into any rumors that the job will be a walk in the park and your golf game will improve. Seek out respected professionals in the industry that might mentor you. Apply for jobs working for PCAs while you’re in school. Ask around about what potential employers have the best reputation for providing their customers with the best service, they are who you’ll want to work for. As I mentioned before, realize that you are



HANS HERKERT

CAPCA Chapter: Sutter Buttes

Education: California State University, Chico

Year of PCA License: 2010

Additional license: Certified Crop Adviser

Employer: Grower’s Ag Service in Yuba City, since 2010



building your reputation now, and if done well, people will go the extra mile to help you succeed.”

Investing in your reputation and working hard are strong themes for Hans. Speaking about his first job he says “It was a lot of work and I had to rely on the lights of the tractor many times in order to meet my deadline. There is a joke in here somewhere about comparing the life of a PCA to shoveling manure, but that isn’t my point. My point is that this job, like many in agriculture, is a lot of hard work and can’t be done from 9 am to 5 pm taking weekends off. I had many jobs throughout high school and college including painting silos at a rice dryer, clerking at a sporting goods store, and general farm labor for three different farming operations. All of these jobs provided me with two things; tuition money for school and a foundation of hard work.” But he sums up his experience thus far with overall satisfaction: “As tough as this job can be, there is a lot of freedom that comes with it. When I was hired by Grower’s Ag Service just before graduating from Chico State, I was told that once my clientele was established, that this job would be the closest thing there is to working for myself. I believe that is true. As a PCA, there is the freedom to manage your own time and to prioritize your days in the way that works best for you and your clients.”

Hans believes in agriculture as an industry that he’s proud to be a part of. “Ag folks are good people and I enjoy the culture.” He believes PCAs have a role in advocating for our industry. “I became aware of the importance of advocacy though my high school FFA program in Colusa. Since then I have tried to be involved in volunteer opportunities when possible. I have been active in my local Farm Bureau and CAPCA chapters. I am also currently enrolled in the California Ag Leadership program as a part of Class

47. I decided to apply for the program two years ago with the goal of learning and building leadership skills that would help me bring value to the industry and also help me in my career. Just past the half way point in the program, I can’t say enough good things about my experiences so far. I recommend that anyone who is interested in building their professional skills and broadening their horizons should look for opportunities like the Ag Leadership Program.

In commenting on his recent participation in CAPCA’s Legislative Day in June, Hans says, “I believe that our industry needs volunteers to advocate for its success. If agriculture does not stand up for itself by advocating in the legislature and educating the public, our future would be very dark. Organizations like CAPCA, Farm Bureau, and numerous commodity groups are making advocacy a high priority. For the PCA specifically, CAPCA is championing the fact that our profession is crucial to our state, particularly for the relationship between farming and the environment. In doing this, CAPCA is providing a great service to our industry that is often over-looked. I feel it is important for every PCA and students thinking of becoming PCAs to join CAPCA. I also believe that it is important for CAPCA members to participate in opportunities such as the recent legislative day. It is your story that is being told, and you may want to be there for it.”

Hans is currently a member of the CAPCA Sutter Buttes Chapter. “I recommend that newer PCAs become involved with their local CAPCA chapter. It is a great opportunity to stay up to date on current issues and to build contacts within the industry. Involvement can be at any level from sitting in on chapter meetings to organizing a continuing education seminar. Young PCAs are the future of our industry and should have a seat at the table.” ■