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Kirby Hettver Building For Future Generations

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Kirby Hettver, MARL Class VI

Note: This is the fourth in a series of articles about past Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL) members leading up to the 20th anniversary of the program.

"I do what I do for the betterment of agriculture for future generations especially for my little girls who will hopefully someday carry the family torch," states Kirby Hettver, MARL Class VI. He hopes to make an impact now and in the future. "I take the same approach as a leader in ag organizations as I do on our own family farm. I hope to make things better and to continue to build for future generations."

Hettver and his wife, Mandi, raise their three daughters on their fifth-generation farm in DeGraff, Minn., where Hettver began his leadership opportunities on local agricultural boards prior to his MARL experience. After MARL, Hettver gained confidence to step-up on the state level where he could provide a greater impact as leadership for the MN Corn Growers Organization where he served as Secretary, Vice President, President and Chairman of the board and Chair of the Government Relations committee.

For Hettver, MARL provided life-long friends who have a wealth of knowledge in various topics. "I have gained an impressive network of ag leaders. Regardless of whether I need expertise on livestock, processing, or a financial related question, MARL's history of participants creates an invaluable wealth of knowledge and experience," Hettver affirms. He is also grateful for the personal impact MARL had for him. "Through MARL, I gained the confidence to step up at the state level where I advocate ag policy and priorities through

interaction with state and federal legislators.”

Hettver immediately recognizes the MARL trips to Itasca, Washington D.C., and his international trip to Morocco where he experienced the Notre Dame Cathedral during a layover in Paris, as some of his most rewarding travel experiences. However, he realizes MARL isn’t about the places visited. “It became more about the people I was with and the personal connections we were able to make. It was understanding and appreciating others with different perspectives.”

MARL strives to blend different backgrounds and perspectives into each class. Hettver encourages those who are devoted to personal growth to apply for MARL. He expresses the need for those “convicted in their beliefs but willing to have an open-mind to listen to others. We also need participants who want to be better and who are willing to embrace the process.” MARL helps leaders critically think about a discussion and understand different perspectives. Hettver recalls, “We don’t always come to a consensus, but it helps to understand where others are coming from when making your own decisions.”

Like many MARL alumni, Hettver has impacted the industry while promoting ag needs and policies locally and nationally. He is encouraged by the impact MARL leaders have on the industry today and will continue to have in the future. “MARL leaders impact every aspect of Minnesota agriculture. You can’t be involved in ag without finding someone in MARL’s network in a leadership role,” he states. Hettver understands this leadership will remain vital as the industry dynamics change. “Although the number in production agriculture keeps decreasing, it becomes more crucial that our influence does not.”

Hettver understands the necessity of balance. Balance of family life and MARL or ag leadership is important to Hettver. He appreciates all he has been able to accomplish through his leadership training and opportunities but also looks forward to being involved in his daughters’ activities as they become busy in school and activities. “There has to be a balance between service and family. I appreciate the time I have committed to the industry, but I also look forward to spending time with my family which my girls certainly deserve.”

Based on his own experiences, Hettver understands there are many hurdles preventing some from applying for MARL. “If time is an issue, know it was an issue for me too. Time is a hurdle you put in front of yourself. We have all had that same hurdle and have successfully cleared it; you can too.” Hettver also recognizes financially MARL may seem out of reach, however, there are many industries willing to assist in the cost of the program.

“I encourage everyone to apply. We need balance. We need farmers, industry, and other ag leaders to join MARL. That balance brings different perspectives to the program which makes MARL great!”

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