

TODAY



[Home](#) / [SMSU Today](#) / [Articles](#)

/ Brian Thalmann makes a difference in his own community after MARL experience

Brian Thalmann makes a difference in his own community after MARL experience

Published Tuesday, April 30, 2019



Brian Thalmann, MARL Class V

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

“If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you always got,” Brian Thalmann, MARL Class V, advises. This quote is at the heart of Thalmann’s leadership experience.

Thalmann, who farms near Plato, MN, with his family, is a 5th generation farmer who farms with his father and his son. Brian and his wife Karen have three children, Eric, Adam and Emily.

Although Thalmann was involved in the Heartland Corn Products (HCP) board of directors before MARL, he greatly expanded his agricultural leadership based on his MARL experiences. “I remember our class was challenged to help organize an event or an organization. So, I worked with our local agriculture teacher and we formed an FFA alumni chapter which is still going strong today,” Thalmann stated. “We are known as the GSL (Glencoe-Silver Lake) Ag Promoters (GAP) which includes agricultural and business leaders from the area school district,” Thalmann explains. One of the major fundraisers they resurrected was the pork chop supper. They have since teamed up with the music

department for this event so there is a jazz band concert the same evening. This allows FFA officers and members to be in official FFA dress while they serve the pork chops and when they play in the jazz band." This helps the community see how active these students are and their leadership roles in many organizations.

This pork chop event is important to the Ag Promoters and in building a connection between the school and community. "Part of our goal was to support agriculture in the schools. We were seeing too many talented kids leave agriculture because they didn't see it having a bright future. We are building a strong connection so they can see the many different possibilities agriculture presents to them," Thalmann stated.

Since MARL, Thalmann has also become more involved in MN Corn Growers Association. "They were strong supporters of MARL, so I wanted to have a chance to give back," Thalmann stated. Since becoming a part of the board, he has served on several state and national action teams and has served as state Treasurer, Vice President and is currently President of the growers organization.

Prior to MARL, Thalmann struggled to think outside the box. "Every year, I build on these skills, and I challenge myself to see different angles before moving forward. Too many leaders and organizations get so caught up in what has always been done," Thalmann states. Therefore, MARL helped Thalmann understand each perspective is valuable to the final outcome.

"Before MARL, I would be presented with a problem and would work to solve it. Then, someone else would suggest a new way. I would kick myself for not seeing it from other aspects!" Thalmann explains. "Now, I always try to build off MARL training. I no longer jump to conclusions as quickly and look for the opposite side of the story. It may not be the direction I choose to go, but I always want to make sure I understand what the other side is thinking. If I can think about the consequences before they happen, it is so much easier than having to deal with unnecessary consequences later!"

To Thalmann, MARL is an intricate unit of diverse people working with each other to connect with greater Minnesota and beyond. "The exposure to other MARL classmates and their experiences or way of thinking is important to understanding what we all have in common. Finding similarities helps individuals and organizations gain credibility among more sectors," Thalmann acknowledged. Throughout Thalmann's MARL experience, he realized regardless of what people believe and which side of an issue they fall, if open-minded without preconceived ideas, everyone has the same basic needs and desires, they just go about them from different angles.

Although many MARL experiences were memorable to Thalmann, he believes his international trip to Cuba had the greatest impact. "Seven years before I traveled to Cuba for MARL, I was on a cruise ship and they announced we were passing Havana, Cuba. At the time, I believed we were doomed if something happened to our ship, however, later, as I stood on the shores of Havana, Cuba, the world became a much smaller place for me. Little did I realize those living in Cuba were people just like you and me." He recalls being approached by an elderly Cuban woman while he was traveling with MARL. She proclaimed, "We love you. We love Americans." This assertion surprised Thalmann who learned throughout the international experience that the people are excited to trade with us and they depend on our tourism. "Without MARL," Thalmann confessed, "I would continue to think of Cuba as a scary land."

Thalmann believes MARL leaders have the potential to do amazing things for their local communities as well as on the state and national level. "Ag has been really good to my family and me over the years. It is important that I give back to the industry which has impacted my life. I need to tell my story and other MARL and ag leaders need to continue to tell theirs," Thalmann explains. "After all," Thalmann continues, "if we aren't telling our story, someone else is going to tell it for us, and we might not like the way they tell it!"