

Application Packet

Minnesota Agricultural and Rural Leadership

Class #14



SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
FOUNDATION


UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

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Welcome Letter #1

Executive Director

WELCOME TO MARL

Welcome to the MARL Program, Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership. This dynamic leadership program is for active and engaged adult agricultural and rural leaders in our state. You have a great opportunity to grow personally and as a leader by participating in this two-year educational experience. The program includes in-state seminars, a national study seminar in Washington D.C., an extensive international study seminar in a select foreign country, and between programs activities and study.

Over the past twenty-four years, 352 individuals have graduated from MARL. They are farmers, agribusiness professionals, non-profit personnel, government agency professionals, and educators. Since the inception when Class I (30 members) was formed in the year 2000 all have benefited from the experience. To date we have thirteen classes who have experienced this robust personal growth and leadership development experience. MARL continues to deliver premier experience. The 25th Year of MARL programing is being celebrated!

A new group of people apply for participation in the MARL Program every two years. There are no academic prerequisites to apply to the program. Adults, ages 25 and older, who are working in rural communities, farming, ranching, or in allied fields (ag finance, inputs, biofuels, logistics, education, and others) with a sphere of influence in Minnesota, all are welcome to apply to become a class member. The 30 seats that are available will have a broad representation across agricultural disciplines, so entrepreneurs, bankers, farmers, seed suppliers, rural community leaders, crop consultants, specialists in many avenues relating to food production and distribution, etc. all learn together and participate in leadership with each other. It is a leadership development experience like no other.

The MARL Program is a special collaboration project initiated at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall and the collaboration is a joint effort with the University of Minnesota Extension Program. A win for all people participating and supported by two education systems in the state.

We hope you will seek to bring excellence in well-being and prosperity to agriculture and rural Minnesota. That is our mission; it is our hope we can collaborate with you. Our focus is “investing in people!”

Kindest Regards,



Brad J. Schloesser
MARL Executive Director

Brad.Schloesser@smsu.edu | 507-420-6854

Welcome Letter #2

Program Director

Congratulations!

You have been identified as a potential applicant for the Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership program (MARL). Being noticed and recognized by others is the first step in realizing your leadership potential. Now it is up to you to take the next step by apply into the program.

What does it mean to be in the MARL program? Being in MARL will help you with the following objectives:

1. Improve your leadership skills and competencies.
2. Enhance your level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence.
3. Improve your knowledge of and familiarity with MN agriculture, relevant issues, and the public policy process at the local, state, and national levels.
4. Enhance your personal and professional networks.
5. Implement a personal leadership development plan.
6. Practice what has been learned in MARL through a leadership project.

You will have an opportunity to achieve these objectives by being a member of a learning community or cohort. The people within this cohort will not only be your co-learners, but they will also become your colleagues, supporters, teachers, confidants, and life-long friends.

The MARL Program has been in existence for over 20 years and during that time the program has shifted to meet the needs and challenges of agriculture and rural communities. Do you want to be prepared for the changes happening in agriculture and rural communities? If so, apply to participate in MARL today. You won't regret that you did, but you most certainly will regret it if you don't.

Sincerely,



Tobias A. Spanier, MARL Program Leader
Extension Professor
Leadership & Civic Engagement
Community Development Department
University of Minnesota Extension
(320) 235-0726 ext. 2020 (507) 220-1812
spani001@umn.edu

Welcome Letter #3 including list of Board of Directors

Board President

Dear MARL Class XIII Applicants:

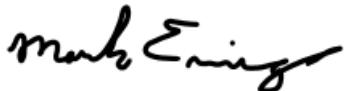
Congratulations on taking the first step toward becoming a new class member of the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL) program. We are thrilled to welcome you to explore our esteemed program and are eager for you to apply to embark on this transformative journey.

The MARL program is committed to cultivating the next generation of leaders in agriculture and rural communities. As you consider joining this community, you will have the opportunity to enhance your leadership skills, broaden your understanding of the agricultural landscape in MN, United States, and world, and engage with the issues that shape rural life in Minnesota.

We see and expect graduates of this program to move on to new leadership roles in their community, work, agricultural organizations, and government. This program, by design, will prepare you for this and add it to your support network with new colleagues from around MN.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or if there's anything I can assist you with as you prepare for this enriching experience. As an alumnus of the program, I continue to support and give back to so that others may experience similar opportunities.

Best,



Mark Enninga

MARL Board President

markenninga@yahoo.com | 763-656-9459

Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Mark Enninga – President
Chelsea Honnette - Vice-President
Roy Wookey – Secretary

Members

Angela Guentzel
Sara Hewitt
Rodd Beyer
Kyle Petersen
Kevin Kruize
Nancy Miller
Nathan Hanel
Duane Carrow
Joanna Schrupp
Todd Geselius
Nick Jackson

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What Is MARL?

Vision

MARL leaders collaborate in bringing excellence in well-being and prosperity to agriculture and rural Minnesota.

Mission

MARL inspires Minnesotans to work together to create new ways to meet an ever-changing future resulting in prosperity for all.

Values

- Personal growth
- Psychological safety
- Inclusivity
- Agility
- Enduring connections

Program Objectives

1. Improve participants' leadership skills and competencies.
2. Enhance participants' level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence.
3. Improve participants' knowledge of and familiarity with MN agriculture, relevant issues, and the public policy process at the local, state, and national levels.
4. Enhance participants' personal and professional networks.
5. Implement a personal leadership development plan.
6. Practice what has been learned in MARL through a personal leadership project.

History

In 1998, Southwest Minnesota State University engaged the Humphrey Institute and Extension at the University of Minnesota in a two-year research and development project. Their study led to the development of a two-year program plan and the first MARL class was selected in 2000 with the first MARL seminar in November of that year. Since then, new classes have begun every two years. Today, MARL is known throughout the state as the premier agriculture and rural leadership development program. Initiating the program in 2000, SMSU invested in the first MARL class.

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Tim Alcorn served as the founding Executive Director of MARL from its inception until March 2011, when he accepted another assignment at Southwest Minnesota State University. Dan Hoffman continued to lead MARL from January 2012 until his retirement in January 2015. Olga Reuvekamp was named Executive Director from March 2015 to October 2022. Brad Schloesser, an alum of MARL, became the Executive Director in December 2022, works virtually most days, and maintains an office on the campus of SMSU in Marshall. As MARL Executive Director he works as an employee of Southwest Minnesota State University – Foundation Team.

Mike Liepold founding long tenured Program Leader, Eriks Dunens, Christy Kallevig, and Toby Spanier have served as Program Leaders. Toby Spanier, Leadership University of Minnesota Extension Specialist, currently provides expertise in curriculum development and delivery. Toby's office is at the University of Minnesota Extension Mid-Central Research & Outreach Center in Willmar.

Advice and guidance of MARL is directed by its Advisory Board of Directors and the SMSU Foundation Board of Directors.

Background

The MARL program has 352 alumni from the first twelve classes. Class #13 is currently experiencing the second year of the program. Class #14 will be selected in 2026 to begin the 22-month leadership development experience.

MARL graduates are making a positive and profound impact on agriculture and rural communities throughout Minnesota. Our leaders serve on commodity boards and county commissions, in legislative chambers and chambers of commerce: building consensus, building teams, building Minnesota. You see the results of our leadership development program when our graduates serve as volunteers and leaders on school, city, church, healthcare, economic development, county, zoning, and industry boards. They are leading by example as members of commodity groups, lending institutions, agribusinesses, and governmental agencies. They are leading by positive influence in our state's legislature, in state agencies, and as governor appointees in various capacities. We are proud of what they have accomplished and of the positive results that will happen in the future. Much of that started when they made their decisions to take part in the MARL program. The MARL experience will prepare you for lifelong leadership opportunities and successes.

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Testimonials: Personal Gain Comments from MARL Graduates

The following are impact statements made by Class members at the conclusion of MARL Class experience...

MARL has provided a one-of-a-kind leadership learning opportunity. I loved that this program provides unprecedented learning about one's self and how leadership skills can blossom and flourish once personal mindset and processing is understood. I am thrilled to have had this experience and look forward to utilizing my new skills to better MN in the future! Class XII

What has my MARL experience meant to me? MARL has been a great opportunity to learn more about rural MN, including representation at the state and national level, develop connections with other leaders that are passionate about agriculture, and motivated me to engage the community in leadership growth.

– Class XI

The whole process has been a wonderful experience for me. There have been time constraints, frustrations, but also moments of reward as things have come together. I have really appreciated the opportunity to work closely with my classmates after spending the last two years learning and growing together, and to also work together with members of previous classes I otherwise would have never had the opportunity to do so. It has become an exclamation point on a wonderful two years of being in the MARL program, which has stretched my ways of thinking and pushed me in new directions I otherwise would probably never have pursued. Class XI

The MARL experience has been excellent for me. It has pushed me outside my comfort zone and challenged me in ways I did not anticipate. I have formed lifelong relationships with my classmates and I look forward to watching them grow in their careers. Class XI

MARL to me has meant many things. It has reinforced for me the power of in-person learning and relationship building. It has taught me that when surrounded by a strong group of natural leaders that you can step back and follow and still be super impactful. It has taught me how important the little things are, like actually getting to know people at the most basic level and learning about them and their families, operations, and occupations. It has given me the opportunity to make friendships that are built solid, surrounding a lot of common interests. It was an epic experience that I'm so grateful to have experienced. Class XI

What makes the MARL program unique is that it gives you connections and training to lead in our rural communities. I thought meeting with our local, state and federally elected officials was what differentiated this program from others offered by employers or trade groups. I am blessed to make lifetime friends, create a new network of people, and have some lasting memories of the program. Class XII

MARL was a stepping stone for me. It gave me more confidence to go full-time to our business and gave me time to reflect on my strengths. I also learned what I need to continue doing to be fulfilled in my new endeavor. Class X

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Rewards will be measured for years to come, and the content is fantastic and helps people access their own leadership skills and build upon them. Class X

Without the two-year program we wouldn't have had enough time to truly develop our relationships as a class! Class X

The impact was immeasurable. The things I learned about myself, the way I was able to grow regarding my EQ-i, and the experiences I had will benefit me, my family, and my community. I am a much better person because of this experience. Class X

I have grown personally and professionally because of the skills I have been taught, the people I have met, and the experiences I've had in MARL. I have been able to evaluate my strengths, my beliefs, and my relationships to find a better sense of self, a better balance and more. I feel like I am a stronger organization member, spouse, employee because of MARL. MARL has taught me how to prioritize, find the value in saying no and evaluate opportunities. Class IX

MARL offered a safe place to practice personal, social, and business development. Given the chance to grow and practice skills developed in life, business, and personal life. Class VIII

The leadership training and personal reflection was great. The EQ-i was the most beneficial assessment that we took. Along with that, the program stretched comfort zones which is always a plus. Class VIII

Being surrounded and connected with talented positive leaders. Greater self-awareness of specific areas of strength. This has allowed me to define some of the reasons for my areas of success in the past. It also has given me confidence to utilize these strengths more effectively. Greater self-awareness of specific weakness. Provides a road map for self-improvement and what kinds of people complement me. Class VII

I was unsure of myself when I joined MARL and wondered why I was in this group of excellent leaders. What did I have to offer? What did people see in me to nominate me? Why was I chosen by the interview committee? At some point, I realized I do have something to offer. I have become more confident in myself and more willing to put myself out there if I am a little more willing to take a risk. It's also helped at home. Positive reinforcement of my kids is so important. Class VII

The tours were very informative, in just a few hours we went from an Amish lifestyle to a carousel and robotic dairy – what a difference in mindset/landscape/business acumen. Even if you aren't interested in dairy, there was plenty to gain from this experience. Class VII

An international study tour is invaluable – the interactions with those who have a distinct culture (different than our own) is eye opening. Furthermore, while traveling in a group has its challenges and frustrations, it also has its benefits – many of which come with the added perspectives that each classmate brings and the added questions they bring to the table for discussion. Class VII

Frequently Asked Questions

Selection Criteria

The Minnesota Agricultural and Rural Leadership program has the following qualifications:

- Resident of Minnesota.
- Committed to Minnesota agriculture and rural communities and their relationship to local, state, national, and international issues.
- A record of demonstrated leadership activity.
- Aspirations for future leadership roles of greater responsibility than previously achieved.
- Commitment by the individual, partners (if applicable), and employer (if applicable) to attend all seminars, pay tuition, and abide by MARL policies.

Mandatory Attendance

The ability to attend and participate in seminar learning experiences is a necessary part of the selection criteria. Because attendance is required, please check the dates of the Class #14 seminars (listed on pages 13-14) before you apply to ensure your availability to attend. In total, the MARL commitment includes 15 days the first year and 25 days the second year away from home.

Family, Partner, and Employer Support

Full participation in the MARL program is necessary both for the success of each individual and for the class. In the last section of the application, you will sign a Statement of Commitment. It is important that you visit with family and partners to ensure their support. If you are employed (not self-employed), your employer must submit the Employer Support Form. (Appendix C.)

Participant Selection

The application and accompanying forms will be reviewed by the Executive Director, the Program Leader, and a Board member prior to a virtual interview using Zoom. The interview will be recorded so Board members can review them along with the recommendations. The MARL Advisory Board of Directors in discussion with the Executive Director and the Program Leader will choose those to include in Class #14 at the June meeting.

The class is anticipated to have 30 members. All applications will be considered, regardless of gender, race, religion, creed, disability, age, marital status, veteran's status, sexual orientation, or national origin and geography within Minnesota. If applicants are not accepted, they are encouraged to re-apply for another class. The current class has multiple participants that had applied previously.

Most applicants are "qualified" to be in the class, but there is only room for 30 class members. MARL is seeking applicants who are receptive to experiential learning, have shown signs of

accepting leadership positions, have the ability and willingness to contribute to the leadership of the class, and are dedicated to a career that advances agriculture and rural community development.

Other considerations for selection include:

- Except in rare cases, close relatives (spouse, brother/sister) will not be selected for the same class.
- The number of participants from the same organization or business entity in one class may be limited.
- It is the goal of the MARL Advisory Board of Directors to have half of the class “hands-on” in a production agriculture occupation, and each class should have diversity among the types of production.
- There may be some applicants that are not selected for Class #14, the need to reapply for a future MARL class – may be an option for some applicants. Suggestions will be shared providing input for future application strategy considerations.
- For those accepted into MARL Class #14 – do anticipate at the end of Year #1 of the program – a recommitment document signing for Year #2 of the program.

Application Timetable

January 1, 2026	Applications open for Class #14
March 31, 2026	Completed applications (including Recommendations (appendix B) and Employer Support Statements (appendix C)) due to MARL. Submission of applications concludes. All recommendations and support statements due by March 31, 2026
April, 2026	Applicants sign-up for interview dates via Calendly (scheduling software platform)
June 1-4, & 9, 2026	Virtual interviews with eligible applicants via Zoom (30-minute interviews)
June-July 2026	Board of Directors selects Class #14, class members notified, public announcement of Class #14 members
September 9-11, 2026	First seminar meeting for Class #14
	Year #2 – September, 2027
	Recommit to MARL Program – Year #2 – document signing

MARL Class #14 Seminars

Eight Core Leadership Content Areas

- **Developing self and others:** learn to seek and use self-assessment and feedback to enhance understanding and performance; to provide others with appropriate and timely feedback and coaching to enhance performance; to create opportunities for development of self and others; to volunteer for and excel at performing various leadership responsibilities, often outside the specific requirements of position or role; and create an environment where risk and innovation is rewarded.
- **Communicating effectively:** learn to listen carefully and use questions skillfully to encourage honest responses; to communicate clear, direct, and honest messages to individuals and groups through speaking, writing and use of technology; and to maintain composure in stressful situations.
- **Leading innovation and change:** learn to recognize the need for innovation without indulging in change for change's sake; to create a vision for the future and communicate it to others; to monitor the external and internal environment for trends that anticipate change; to understand the range of reaction to change, including resistance, anxiety and uncertainty; to develop and implement a change process appropriate to the organization and the degree of change.
- **Fostering collaboration:** learn to see issues and opportunities from many perspectives; to link resources – public and private, national, and international; to balance the needs and expectations of many stakeholders; and to facilitate programs that collaborate across structural, organizational, and international boundaries.
- **Managing conflict:** learn to use a range of strategies to deal with conflict between self and others; to mediate conflict among others; to recognize the root causes of conflict; to engage in difficult conversations appropriately to both resolve the conflict and strengthen the relationship.
- **Valuing diversity and inclusion:** to express sensitivity and awareness of the diversity inherent in and vital to a modern society; to appreciate and actively engage human differences in social and professional settings; to develop the capacity to facilitate multi-cultural and inclusive relationships; to be an active part of creating organizational cultures that value diversity and inclusion.
- **Leading with integrity and values:** learn to understand and honor organizational and cultural values; to communicate personal values and influence personal leadership; to demonstrate consistency between espoused values and values in action; to respect the values of others; to act ethically.
- **Developing a deeper knowledge and appreciation of agriculture and rural communities:** learn to understand agriculture in its many different models; to understand the history and traditions of rural communities; to compare different models of agriculture; and to understand the role of leadership in producing economic, social, and environmental change in agriculture and rural communities.

Program Structure and Delivery Method

The program is a two-year educational experience featuring a mix of in-person sessions, hybrid sessions (virtual and small group in-person) and mini-virtual leadership content presentations. In-person sessions include a variety of communities and regions across the state of Minnesota, a national session in Washington, DC, and an international session. The specific schedule, locations, and dates can be found in the Program Schedule and Outline section.

In addition to the designated MARL sessions, participants are expected to continue leadership learning and development throughout their enrollment in the program. This includes monthly assignments, peer coaching meetings, leadership development plans, and leadership projects.

Program Schedule and Outline

The following schedule is tentative and subject to change but provides an outline of what is to be covered during MARL. Seminar topics and activities are not all included. Specific workshops may need to be shifted from one seminar to another depending on speakers, tours, and facilities available, etc.

Year 1

Dates and Location	Theme, Topics, and Activities
August 5, 2026 Redwood Falls (Optional Attendance)	Farmfest Picnic – Announcement of Class #14 Networking with MARL Alumni and Stakeholders
September 16-18, 2026 Itasca State Park Thursday-Friday	MARL Class #14 Leadership Journey Preparing for Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Leadership Context • Growth Mindset • Strengths Based Leadership (StrengthsFinder Assessment) • Peer Coaching
December 2-4, 2026 Austin Wednesday-Friday	Communicating Effectively <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and Regional Demographics and Economies • Art of Questioning and Listening • Meeting Design and Management
January 19-21, 2027 Mankato – MN Ag Expo Tuesday-Thursday*	Strengths-Based Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths Based Leadership (StrengthsFinder Assessment) • Ag. Issues and Policy Awareness • The State of Rural
February 17-19, 2027 St. Paul Legislative Session Wednesday-Friday	Visionary Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding our WHY and Shared Vision • State and Regional Demographics and Economies • Legislative Appointments
March 17-19, 2027 Regional Locations Wednesday-Friday	Regional Assets and Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Dynamics – Teamwork • Practice Storytelling and Communicating • Leadership Projects Introductions

June 16-18, 2027 Pipestone Wednesday-Friday	Leading Self and Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Intelligence (EQi) • Year One Review & Year Two Overview & Commitment • MARL Shark Tank
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Year 2

Dates and Location	Theme, Topics, and Activities
August 4, 2027 Redwood Falls	Farmfest Picnic – Networking with MARL Alumni and Stakeholders (Optional Attendance)
September 15-17, 2027 TBA – Location Wednesday-Friday	Navigating Conflict with Success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Kilmann Conflict Assessment • Mining, Forestry and Shipping
November 14-18, 2027 Washington, DC Sunday-Thursday	Fostering Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence and Power • Legislative Appointments • Agricultural Policy • Leadership Search
January 12-14, 2028 Willmar Wednesday-Friday	Leading Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • Passion and Purpose for Leading • Preparing for International Seminar
February 16-29, 2028 International Seminar (Travel window) [10 to 14 days – t.b.d.]	International Study Tour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Basket Survey • MARL Amazing Race • Intercultural Development • International Trade & Issues
March 30-31, 2028 Marshall, Southwest Minnesota State Univ. or Location TBD	Graduation and Leadership Exhibitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for future leadership • Staying connected as MARL Alumni

* In selecting international seminar locations, the board considers factors such as: educational potential of the destination, safety issues, program budget, length of travel, contacts in the country, and other logistical issues. Every effort is made to select a challenging yet meaningful destination, and the final decision on location is always a board decision, in consultation with a committee and with the executive director and program leader.

Recent Past International Seminars with MARL

Vietnam	Panama	Ecuador	Cambodia	Taiwan	Chile
Croatia	China	South Africa	Morocco	Cuba	Argentina

Financial Commitment

There is no cost to apply to the program. If selected, there is a class member tuition fee of

\$8,000.00, which can be paid in four installments during the program, or a full tuition payment up front is an option, SMSU Foundation can accommodate. Payment by check or credit card is accepted.

• August 31, 2026	\$ 1,500
• October 15, 2026	\$ 1,500
• July 31, 2027	\$ 2,500
• October 15, 2027	\$ 2,500

Total tuition = \$ 8,000.00

Class member tuition covers approximately 35 percent of the total cost of the program, with the balance paid by corporations and associations who share our vision for strong leadership, and alumni and supporters of MARL. Financial assistance may be available to help those selected to offset their tuition.

MARL pays for hotel rooms when part of a seminar, airfare to and from the National and International Seminars, bus transportation during a seminar, and most meals incurred during seminars.

The cost of getting to and from each seminar or a hub airport is not included in class member tuition. There may be some meals not paid for by MARL, transportation or other minor incidental costs, and gratuities for professional drivers and tour guides. Participants will be notified in advance of these occasions.

Expectations & Requirements

Each person selected for the program will be expected to adhere to MARL expectations and policies. These include a fundamental respect for each other, the advancement of each member's leadership education, and the reputation of the MARL program. The following summarizes the program expectations.

Professional Attitude

Participants are investing time and money in their participation, as are the many MARL investors. Participants are expected to have an open mind, a willingness to learn and grow, to function as a team player, respect opinions that differ from their own, and a commitment to greater service to the betterment of agriculture and rural communities.

Conduct

As an ambassador for the agricultural industry and rural Minnesota and as a representative of the MARL program, each member is expected to conduct oneself with integrity and in an appropriate manner befitting a leader. Behavior displayed during seminars, both during sessions and during unscheduled time, should be a positive reflection on the MARL program. Alcoholic beverages will not be consumed during official seminar activities, and intoxication or tardiness due to alcohol are not accepted. The use of tobacco or vaping products during indoor meetings or class activities also is not permitted.

Attendance

Attendance at all seminars is expected. The only exception is for personal or family emergencies or serious illness.

Attire

As with any business or distinguished program, participants should always present themselves in a professional manner. Participants are expected to dress in Business Formal or Business Casual attire as specified on the agenda for most seminar days, with less formal attire required for site tours or special weather conditions. Jeans are permitted only when specified on the agenda. Field or farm attire is not appropriate.

Vaccination Status

MARL prioritizes the health and safety of our class while recognizing that health decisions are a personal matter. MARL does not require COVID-19 vaccination for selection to the program. However, applicants should be aware that their vaccination status may affect their ability to participate in some educational and travel experiences. MARL will respectfully abide by all masking and vaccination requirements and guidelines of our seminar locations and the sites we visit.

Travel and Roommates

To reduce program expenses and promote conversation and friendship between class members, MARL will assign same-sex roommates for each hotel night provided by the program. Class members are expected to stay with the roommate assigned, and to stay at the hotel even if the seminar location is close to home. Lodging is provided for seminar nights; if class members wish to come early or stay late, that will be at his/her expense.

Fundraising Participation

Each MARL class holds a fundraising auction at the end of the program to contribute toward the expenses for the next class. Each class member is expected to participate in the effort to produce the auction event as a gesture of support towards the future of the MARL program, regardless of any other personal or professional fundraising obligations.

Ready To Apply?

Instructions

MARL uses an online application portal. You may wish to prepare your responses in advance, then copy and paste them into the electronic application portal. Please see Appendix A of this Application Packet for the application questions.

All applicants will receive acknowledgment of receipt of their application and recommendation forms from MARL. The selection committee will screen all applications. MARL will notify each applicant of his or her acceptance status after the selection has been made.

Checklist

1. Complete the Application Form (Appendix A), which includes contact information for three people you have asked to complete a Recommendation for your application.
2. Provide the link to the Recommendation Form (Appendix B) to the three people you have identified as references.
3. If you are not self-employed, you must provide link for your workplace supervisor to complete the Employer Support Form (Appendix C).

Your application is not complete until the MARL Executive Director has all application components in hand. Please allow your references and employer plenty of time to complete their forms in advance of the application deadline of March 31, 2026.

Thank you again for your interest in the MARL program! Please feel free to contact Brad Schloesser, Executive Director, with any questions.

Contact information: Email -> Brad.Schloesser@smsu.edu cell phone -> 507-420-6854

Application Portal

[The link to the online form for application to MARL Class #14 will be made available January 1, 2026](#)

Appendix A: MARL Application Questions

Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership Class #14, 2026-2028 Application (To be completed online) this is only a sample of the questions. It is recommended that an applicant prepare their answers in a word document and then paste them into the on-line application form. Following completion of the form – click submit.

Application does not save so ensure you have ample time to fill it out at one sitting, so you do not lose information. Use the information below to become familiar with the application. It is easier if you prepare your answers prior to filling out the questionnaire.

Contact Information

1. Full name

2. Minnesota Resident?

Yes
 No

3. Current address (street, city, state and zip code – please provide all)

4. Cell Phone number

5. Work Phone Number

6. Email address

Education and Training

1. Please list ALL schools attended back to (and including) high school, include military and institutions where licensure education was pursued. Also list significant non-degree educational activities (e.g., certification courses, professional development programs.) Please include Degree/Certificate Completed, including the Area of Study.

2. Which of the following best describes your occupation? (Select all that apply)

- Full time farm owner/operator
- Part time farm owner/operator
- Agribusiness - service provider, etc.
- Not-for-profit organization, government agency, educational institution

Current Employment

Skip to next question if only checked full-time or [part-time owner/operator] Question #2 above.

3. Your Title

4. Years in Present Position

5. Supervisor name ("self" if self-employed)

6. Briefly describe the business or businesses you are an owner and/or an employee work in or for, including size, type, number of employees, any recent changes, etc. (Limit to 100 words)

7. Briefly describe your work responsibilities. (Limit to 100 words)

8. Please list previous employment: Employer name, dates of employment, and your position.

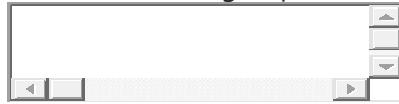
Community Service

9. List your voluntary contributions to your community. Please include the organization, activities performed, and the date range.



A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

10. List your **current** memberships and offices held in organizations (agricultural, commodity, church, civic, political, fraternal groups, service, etc.). Please include the organization, activities performed, and the date range.



A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

11. List your **past** memberships and offices held in organizations (agricultural, commodity, church, civic, political, fraternal groups, service, etc.). Please include the organization, activities performed, and the date range.



A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

12. AWARDS AND HONORS: Please include the Organization, the Award, and the Date received for each one.



A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

Short Answer Questions

13. What are the two most important agricultural issues today and why are they important?
(Limit each response to 100 words or less)



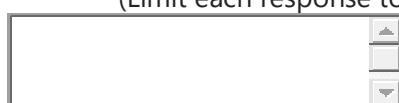
A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

14. What are the two most important issues facing your community and rural Minnesota. Why are they important?
(Limit each response to 100 words or less)



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15. Briefly describe something you think you need to learn or develop to become a more effective leader.
(Limit each response to 100 words or less)



A rectangular text input box with a scroll bar on the right side and navigation buttons (left, right, up, down) at the bottom.

16. What leadership talents/strengths and/ experiences do you think you could share with your classmates?
(Limit each response to 100 words or less)

17. MARL is investing in your leadership development, how do you plan to use the knowledge, contacts, and experiences gained? (Limit to 200 words)

18. Recognizing that attendance at all sessions is mandatory, what hurdles or challenges do you see inhibiting your participation in MARL? How will you overcome these hurdles or challenges?

Statement of Commitment

19. Please check all Boxes as an agreement for each item.

- If selected, I will attend all scheduled sessions of Year 1 (2026-2027) and follow through on agreed upon responsibilities.
- If selected, my tuition of Year 1 - \$ 3,000 total, will be covered timely. First installment of \$ 1,500 on August 31, 2026, Second installment of \$1,500 on October 15, 2026.
- I also understand that the final selection of applicants is the sole responsibility of the MARL Advisory Board.
- I further understand that in May, 2027, I will consider committing to Year 2 (2027-2028) for that portion of the program.
- I will participate in a June, 2026 interview with the MARL selection committee (you will receive selection date via email in late April or early May via Calendly).

References

20. List below the names and contact information for the three people you have asked to complete the online Recommendation Forms, due April 15, 2026. Please include name, email address, and phone number for each.

Signature: Please type your name as a form of E-signing

21. Interview Dates – block these dates for potential MARL Selection Interview

30-Minute interviews are held online via Zoom and are anticipated to be conducted during the following dates:
Monday, June 1, 2026, Tuesday, June 2, 2026, Wednesday, June 3, 2026, Thursday, June 4, 2026
or Tuesday, June 9, 2026

[Back] or [Submit] Application

When you fill out the FORM – you will have the option to download your responses as well as the option to have it emailed to you for your records.

Appendix B: MARL Recommendation Form

MARL applicant: Please provide the online link of this form at XXXX to each of the three persons you named in the References section of the program application. Will be released with the application on 01/01/2026.

Confidential Recommendation for MARL Applicant

Candidate's Name: _____

All recommendations must be completed by **March 31, 2026**

As we search for people with leadership potential, we would appreciate your frank evaluation of his/her abilities and attitudes. All information will be treated confidentially and will be used only by members of the Selection Committee.

1. I know the applicant in a _____ business or _____ personal capacity: (please check one)

Thoroughly Fairly well Superficially

2. How long have you known the applicant? _____ (identify months & years)

3. What is the nature of your association with the applicant?

4. Please comment on what you think the applicant would contribute to the class, the industry and/or the community. (Strengths to share.)

5. Please provide one or two growth areas for the applicant. (Opportunities for improvement)

Signed: _____

Title/Occupation: _____

Address: _____
(Street)

(City)

(Zip Code)

() _____
(Telephone)

Thank you for completing this recommendation.

If any questions please reach out to Brad J. Schloesser, MARL Executive Director
Email: Brad.Schloesser@smsu.edu or call (507) 420-6854

Appendix C: Employer Support Form

MARL applicant: If you are not self-employed, please provide your workplace supervisor this online link _____. Your employer must authorize your absence from employment to participate in the MARL program.

Instructions for applicant's workplace supervisor: Please complete this form electronically using the link given above after it becomes available on January 1, 2026.

This form must be in hand to MARL Executive Director no later than April 15, 2026.

Employer support

FOR APPLICANTS WHO ARE NOT SELF-EMPLOYED: Please have your employer complete the form and submit it to the on-line portal.

Dear Employer,

Please complete the following information to confirm your organization's willingness to grant the candidate time away from work for attendance at the seminars of the MARL, if selected.

MARL members will be expected to attend eleven seminars during the 22-month program. MARL Seminars are normally held from Noon Wednesday to Noon Friday, with some exceptions. The time commitment for seminars of MARL Class #14 will be 15 days the first year and 25 days the second year. Nine seminars rotate around the state, one is held in Washington, D.C. in Year 1 (2027), and an international study seminar will be held abroad – destination to be determined, in Year 2 (2028).

Please feel free to contact the MARL office if you have any questions. Phone: 507-420-6854, Email: Brad.Schloesser@SMSU.edu

It is agreed that if _____ is accepted in Class #14 of MARL, their absence from work will be arranged during seminars.

EMPLOYER		Date	
Signature			
Name		Title	
Business Name			
Street Address			
City	State	Zip Code	Phone

Please complete and submit or email to **Brad.Schloesser@SMSU.edu** on or before March 31, 2026.

www.marlprogram.org | 1501 State Street | Marshall, MN 56258 | T: 507-537-7488

Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Complaints of discrimination may be filed through <https://www.smsu.edu/administration/affirmativeaction/index.html>