

Marion Calmer Narrative Statement

Marion Calmer, founder/owner/CEO of Calmer Corn Heads, president of Calmer's Ag Research Center and a 1978 Black Hawk College graduate, developed the world's first ultra-narrow row corn head and numerous other patented harvesting technologies, which have revolutionized how corn is grown and managed around the world.

These ultra-narrow rows substantially decrease in-row plant competition compared to traditional row widths. This technology maximized corn yields, erosion control, natural weed control, production of organic matter and farmer profitability. This technology was not possible before Marion invented the universal corn-picking unit. It ultimately will decrease the use of chemical weed control, protect our environment and improve soil health.

In the mid-1980s, Marion opened one of the nation's first independent on-farm research centers. The research center allows Marion to share his honest opinion with years of unbiased information on various profitable and environmentally friendly approaches to growing and harvesting corn and soybeans.

Dear Distinguished Members of the Awards Committee,

On behalf of the college and Board of Trustees of Black Hawk College District #503, I am pleased to nominate Marion Calmer of Calmer Cornheads for the ICCTA Distinguished Alumnus Award.

If you've had a meal today, it is said to thank a farmer. Marion Calmer is one of the people behind our farmers helping them grow more grain in an eco-friendly way. He has not only been a champion of No-Till farming, but has developed products making farmers fields more productive. Marion has developed technology to grow and harvest corn using innovative row spacing. The sustainable agriculture he promotes feeds our world in an eco-friendly way reducing soil erosion, reducing weeds, increasing moisture, and thus reducing chemicals. He believes this technology could increase world-wide corn production by 5%.

As a 1978 graduate of the Black Hawk College East Campus, he is not only a credit to the program, but an example to community college students today. Marion established his Ag Research Center and started researching for a way to increase yields, thus making more food available. Through his research he invented the technology to switch from planting in standard 30 inch rows to 15 inch rows. His research showed the improvement in conservation and yields with 15-inch rows on a consistent basis. That led to his next major undertaking, designing a corn head for harvesting 15- inch rows. At that time, the major farm equipment companies did not sell a 15-inch corn head for harvesting. Marion then formed Calmer Cornheads to design and manufacture a row unit and corn head to pick corn planted in 15-inch rows. He was among the first to design a row unit that was effective in picking corn in 15-inch rows. His business has continued to grow in the number of heads made each year and he continues to do research and development to improve the design of the row unit. Marion has not rested there and continues to develop smaller row spacings. His research center is the largest independently funded, farmer-run Ag research center in the United States. Why do all of this? To quote Marion, its simple: "By the year 2050 there will be over 10 billion people on this planet. We have to start today figuring out how to grow more corn so we will be able to feed them in the year 2050."

Marion is one of the 40 No-Till Legends, has served on an advisory board for the 2014 US Farm Bill under Representative Cheri Bustos, named as one of agriculture's 25 most influential people, and led the first team of agriculturalists to the Gulf of Mexico to examine high fertilizer content in the water. He is an inventor, advocate, speaker, President & CEO of Calmer Cornheads but most importantly he is a farmer. Farmers feed the world but what sets Marion Calmer apart is his drive to multiply the world's production in an eco-friendly way.

Marion Calmer represents the best of not only Community College Graduates but Small Town America impacting our planet in a positive eco-friendly way.

Our board is pleased to support the nomination of Marion Calmer for the ICCTA Distinguished Alumnus Award for 2020.

Sincerely,

Fritz Larsen
Chairman
Black Hawk College Board of Trustees

Responses to Each Award Criteria Question

1. Outstanding success and distinction in chosen field:

- Owner of 16 U.S. and 2 international corn harvesting patents.
- Inventor of award-winning corn harvesting technologies that have helped decrease world hunger, improve soil health and water quality.
- Inventor of the world's first 12-and-15-inch corn heads.
- Builder of the world's largest corn heads.
- Named one of agriculture's 25 most influential people.
- Recipient of the "Public Image of Agriculture" award out of 200,000 farmers in the United States.
- Founder of Calmer's Independent Ag-Research Center
 - Nation's largest independent, farmer-run research center, aimed at helping farmers become more profitable and better stewards of America's lands and waterways.
- Contributing member of the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill Advisory Board.
- Voted as one of the 40 No-Till legends.
- Founder of the Farmer-led Innovative Nutrient Application Management group
 - First independent, farmer-led group of its kind to research various fertilizer applications with the aim of improving water quality and profitability.
- On the cover of 11 U.S. agriculture magazines and 1 European magazine.
- Commencement speaker at Black Hawk College East Campus Commencement in 1998.
- Outstanding Agri-Business Club Alumni Award (Black Hawk College)
- Speaker at agricultural farmer meetings for Monsanto, DuPont, Pioneer, John Deere, Case, University of Illinois, Iowa State University, University of Minnesota, Purdue University Top Farmer, University of Wisconsin, University of Nebraska, Penn State University and University of Missouri.
- In Paul Harvey's closing statement from his noon broadcast about Marion Calmer's revolutionary invention in December 1995 – "In my humble opinion, Marion Calmer's technology has changed the way corn will be grown worldwide for the rest of time..."
- DuPont Young Leader Award
- Junior Chamber Young Farmer Award
- Recipient of several State and national soil conservation awards

2. Humanitarian service has proven greatly beneficial to society:

From a young age, Marion Calmer dedicated his life to finding more efficient and effective ways of feeding the world's growing population, while simultaneously researching and finding ways farmers can be better stewards of America's land, waterways and environment. There is often a misconception that in the "higher yields vs. environmentally friendly" debate, one must fall victim to the other, but Calmer has proven that the two go hand in hand.

Given the fact that agricultural production needs to double by 2050, Marion knew that growing corn in narrower rows was the only way to accomplish this challenge. By moving to narrower rows, farmers better utilize available farm ground, allowing the corn plant to produce more, increase natural weed control with less herbicides, maximize erosion control, and increase profitability for farmers. Although studies indicated that narrow row corn was the future of corn production, there was no means of harvesting the crop of the future until Marion invented and built the world's first 15- inch corn head in

1994. Although this invention opened the door for the future of corn production worldwide, Marion didn't rest on his laurels. In 2012, he again released another "world's first" by inventing the first corn head to harvest 12- inch rows, a concept being explored to push yield barriers even further. Because corn is the number one crop in the world and a commodity necessary to produce food, fuel and fiber, this technology has enabled farmers to answer the world's call for increasing corn production and decreasing world hunger.

Throughout the years, Marion's commitment to finding ways for farmers to become better stewards of the land and waterways remains undeterred. In the fall of 1995, Marion led the first team of agriculturalists to the Gulf of Mexico to consult with the EPA and fish farmers about the high nutrient loading of the Mississippi River during high flow rates. The excessive high flow rates were coming from the upper Mississippi watershed (the Cornbelt), which was linked to agricultural fertilizers. These higher-than-normal nutrient loads were suspected to contribute to hypoxic water (low oxygen) at the mouth of the Mississippi River, which was ultimately nicknamed "The Dead Zone" because fish would die without adequate oxygen. Marion's proactive response was one of the first signals to the environmental community that farmers in-fact wanted to find a workable solution to the problem as much as anyone. After coming home from New Orleans, Marion contacted many members of the ag media who in turn wrote articles educating farmers on the dangers of over-fertilizing. Since that time, there have been many changes made by farmers nationwide to better protect our environment from nutrient runoff, which has both a lasting and positive humanitarian impact for generations to come.

3. Continued interest in and support of education and community colleges:

Marion Calmer has been a highly active alumnus since he graduated in 1978. Having served as a member of the Black Hawk College Agribusiness Club since his graduation, on the club's Board of Directors from 1984-90 and as the president of the board in 1990, Marion has remained committed to the furtherance of Black Hawk's mission, which is to provide the environment and resources to individuals to become lifelong learners.

Since 1988, Calmer has regularly hosted annual harvest and safety seminars for Black Hawk students, where he engages with them hands on to cover important combine settings for increased efficiency and profitability on their home farms. Marion has not only lent his time to helping the students, but his continuous and generous financial support to the Black Hawk College East Foundation has provided scholarships, program enrichment and has led to an increase in the overall college experience for East Campus students during a time of increased competitiveness within the higher education arena. Marion has lent his resources beyond the community college level as well, sponsoring several doctoral research initiatives important to the furtherance of global agriculture, with the University of Illinois.

Furthermore, Calmer gave the commencement address, "Believing in a Dream," at the Black Hawk College East Campus Commencement in 1998. He served on the Ag Advisory Council at the East Campus for 11 years and was the council's chairman for four years. For the past 30 years and counting, Calmer also hosts annual research plot tours during the summer months for the East Campus' ag production students.

4. Overcoming life's obstacles:

Marion explains the obstacles he has faced – My business journey started in 1975 after I graduated from high school when I borrowed \$500 from the bank and \$500 from my grandmother to start my own farming operation. Many tough economic years of farming helped build my tenacity to push through the

difficult times while forcing me to think outside the box when solving problems. Luckily, as the descendant of a long line of entrepreneurs, I was born with the gift of finding solutions to problems. Because there was no extra money around to pay others to fix machinery problems, I spent thousands of hours not just fixing problems that occurred on my farm, but getting to the root cause of the problem and then modifying, inventing and building my own equipment. There were many difficult years where I was near bankruptcy, but I continued to believe “I can do this.”

The path that has led me to where I am today has been an emotional and financial one. A constant battle between the dream of my inventions changing the world and the reality of bankruptcy looming right around the corner. Naysayers said, “It’s already been done” and “You’ll never make it.” If I listened, they would have been right. But I didn’t, and I kept pushing for my dream.

In 2002, I opened Calmer Corn Heads in a farm shed located in Alpha, Illinois. We ended the first year with a meager \$6,500 in sales. Luckily the business started to grow. Our next obstacle was the lack of facilities and employees to handle the workload. We applied for a rural economic development loan and were approved. We used the dollars to purchase the 12,000-square-foot facility that we are in today. With only eight employees, we shut operations down at the farm and moved seven miles away to our current location.

The next obstacle ended up being larger than I anticipated. Since we had shut the company down to move, there was little to no income. Our moving expenses and upgrading the new facility put us in a cash flow squeeze that had us all wondering if we could recover. By December 2005 our accounts payable exceeded \$250,000, and our accounts receivable was at zero. As I sat in my office, the fear of bankruptcy consumed my every thought. I started reading some of the encouraging notes that were hanging on the walls from 10 years earlier when the news broke of my revolutionary invention. I came across one from an individual that I did not even know, it was simply a quote from Henry Ford – “Whether you think you can, or think you can’t, you are right.” The following week we hosted a seminar for prospective customers and a farmer from Iowa sat down with me after the meeting and said, “I believe in your concepts. I want to buy two corn heads from you for next harvest. Here is a check for \$100,000, and I will pay you the balance when I pick up the corn heads next summer.” Since then, we have built a multi-million-dollar company with many product lines that are changing how corn is grown and managed around the globe.

The American dream is life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Only in America can you do what I have done. I wake up every morning thanking my lucky stars that I can live the American dream.

5. Completion of a recognized program of instruction at an Illinois public community college: Marion earned an Associate in Applied Science in Agriculture Production Technology from Black Hawk College East Campus (Galva, IL) in 1978.

Marion Calmer Self-Statement: How My Community College Education Has Shaped My Life

Black Hawk College agriculture and conservation classes left lasting impressions on me that I carry with me every day. I studied and retained information at school in the morning, tested the theories on my farm in the afternoon, evaluated in the evening, and then discussed with my peers and instructors in class the next morning. With the knowledge of scientific protocol instilled in me at Black Hawk College, I went on to create the largest independent farmer-run Ag research center in the United States.

My teachers and parents taught me that you get far more out of life by giving than receiving. I was so excited about the things I learned at school that I took it on as a duty to give back by sharing the information I learned to help other farmers. I started by calling farm magazines and telling my story. I asked agribusinesses if they would like me to speak at their farmer meetings about my findings. Ultimately, those connections segued into my speaking career. Now, I give seminars at the local, state, national and international levels. I credit my experiences at Black Hawk College and serving on the college bowl team for giving me confidence and quick problem-solving skills necessary to deliver engaging and informative presentations.

Black Hawk College instructors helped me recognize my inventive skills. The hands-on approach I learned enabled me to dream bigger, which resulted in my revolutionary harvesting inventions. I will be *forever* thankful for my community college experience and education.