

What is the TRUE value of membership?

By Howard Halderman, AFM

Professionals face choices many Americans must make every year. What organizations, professional or personal, deserve my time, dollars and talents? This is a struggle for me, as I am sure it is for many of you. Much of this country's success is due to the work done by volunteers in organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, school boards, charitable foundations, etc.

Organizations work diligently to retain members and add a few each year. We all give some thought each year to membership when we pay our annual dues. What I've found is that whatever organization I choose welcomes and values me as a member, but it is my involvement that defines the value of that organization to *ME*. So what is the **TRUE** value of membership in any organization?

- 1) **NETWORKING** – Through my membership in the ASFMRA our firm benefits from the network of colleagues in the organization. Years ago we (a Midwest based firm) had clients interesting in buying land in the Mississippi River Delta. Through my contacts in that region we accomplished their goals. Both firms made money and ultimately we accomplished what our client wanted, very successfully!
- 2) **EDUCATION** – The ASFMRA offers tremendous education designed for our profession. Courses in our fields of work are available from other resources, but the ASFMRA courses are specific to agriculture so the education is extremely focused and related to what we do. Students benefit from the network and friendships they develop in class for years to come.
- 3) **CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS** – The ASFMRA uses grants, scholarships, time, and education to further our industry and provide for its future. Agriculture is a much healthier industry because of the ASFMRA and the members it develops each year!
- 4) **POLITICAL ISSUES** – An organization with thousands of members can influence government in ways no individual can. The ASFMRA allows single voices to be heard in the halls of Congress and in state legislatures like never before. The ASFMRA does a tremendous service for its members by watching the political actions and notifying membership when an important issue arises.
- 5) **PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT** – Every person I hire knows that their personal growth and education will continue. Organizations like the ASFMRA are great places where young members can learn and develop leadership, communication, and people skills, to name a few.
- 6) **FRIENDSHIP & FUN** – Operating alone can sometimes feel like being on an island. Even if you are a one or two person shop finding the time and the right venue for networking can be challenging! Professional organizations are an excellent place to expand your network, make life-long friends that will provide assistance and further your education. Your island does not feel so isolated and finding help is a phone call or email away. Annual meetings become fun as well as rewarding for everyone involved!

The ASFMRA is one of these organizations. The dues are reasonable, comparatively speaking, but they are still significant. Any one of the six valuable opportunities listed above will more than offset the dues paid. Capitalize on one-half of them and your return on investment is likely well over 100%. Make all six meaningful and the rewards go far beyond the economic returns. They become life-long markers you leave behind where you made this world a better place!