



Les Baucum; Manager Sugarcane Agronomy; 111 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Clewiston, FL 33440

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It is with great pleasure that I write this letter to support the nomination of Eugene “Gene” McAvoy to the NACAA Hall of Fame. The NACAA Hall of Fame is reserved for the best of the best, those who have demonstrated a sustained commitment, dedication and effective leadership in their performance as an outstanding Extension Educator. In the many roles that Gene has served at the local, state, national and international levels, he has distinguished himself as an exemplary Extension Educator at every level. In fact, Gene has been an “Extension” Educator his entire adult life, well before he was affiliated with UF IFAS Extension. Upon graduation from Rutgers, Gene served both extension type and humanitarian roles internationally with both the Peace Corps and the US Agency for International Development in Niger, West Africa. Gene’s Hall of Fame level of success as an Extension Educator is driven by his love of agriculture and a true desire to help others in any ways that he can. I have seen this desire to help others expressed in many different ways; primarily in his life’s role as an educator, but also as a worker bee. I have witnessed Gene spending many hours outside of “office-hours”, helping to raise money for scholarships for deserving students, mentoring young agents and 4-H members and working in his church and his community to lend a hand wherever there is a need.

I had the pleasure (and the fortune) to meet Gene professionally in 2004, when I was working as an Agriscience teacher at a local school. Since then I have interacted with Gene in many different roles including as a client, an employee and a peer. After working fifteen years in private industry and one year teaching school, I was hired as the UF IFAS Regional Specialized Sugarcane Extension Agent II for southwest Florida and assigned to the Hendry County Extension office, where Gene became my immediate supervisor and my mentor. To say that Gene helped to develop and guide my Extension career would be the largest of understatements. As my supervisor Gene encouraged extension excellence not only through extension education but also through volunteerism and leadership in both community and professional organizations. With Gene’s guidance and mentorship, I had a very successful and satisfying tenure with UF IFAS Extension, ultimately serving as County Extension Director while continuing my role as Regional Specialized Extension Agent III. In 2015, I made a career decision to return to private industry and since that time my relationship with Gene has been as a well-served, well informed “client”.

In my roles within FACAA, NACAA, various State and local committees and within our regional agricultural area, I have witnessed first-hand the respect and admiration other leaders have for Gene. This respect and admiration has been earned through his work ethic, his obvious passion for all things agriculture, his natural tendency to be an educator, his attention to detail and his ability to make those around him better persons and better educators. Being an extension educator and a leader of people is not a job for Gene, it’s who he is, it’s what he will always be.

One needs only to follow Gene's path of service and leadership throughout his career to recognize that he is an exceptional NACAA Hall of Fame candidate. From his service as FACAA President in 2004, when Florida served as host of the NACAA meeting, to his service on the Board of Directors, South Region Director and ultimately President of the NACAA and now serving as President of JCEP, Gene has delivered unmatched leadership and helped to deliver our profession through complicated times. To this day Gene maintains an active role in educating the general public, policy makers and community leaders about the importance of the agricultural industry to our local, state and national economies. Gene continues to work closely with our local and regional growers and continues to serve in active roles of volunteerism to local and regional civic and professional organizations.

Not only has Gene been a tireless extension educator and a persistent advocate of agriculture, he has played a significant role in the career development and advancement of countless Extension Agents and other agriculturalists, myself included. I am honored to be asked to write a letter of support for Gene's nomination to the NACAA Hall of Fame and I know of no one else who is more deserving of this recognition. Should the committee have any questions regarding Gene's Hall of Fame career please feel free to contact me at any time.

With Highest Regards,

Leslie Baucum

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