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Agricultural machinery pioneer, Helmut Claas, dies

Helmut Claas, long-time Managing Director, Chairman of the Supervisory Board and Chairman of the Shareholders' Committee of the CLAAS group, died on January 5 at the age of 94.

His death has come as a great shock. Along with the family and all of the relatives, not only are well over 11,000 employees around the world mourning, but so too is an entire industry which, in Helmut Claas, has lost a significant European business personality.

Helmut Claas was born in 1926 in Harsewinkel. His parents, August and Paula

Claas, managed a small agricultural machinery firm with a workforce of around 100. He completed an apprenticeship as a machine fitter after graduating from school. Practical experience followed in metalworking firms, and further practical training in casting. After a complementary study of agriculture in Paris, he took over the planning and establishment of a CLAAS distributor in France, which now operates as CLAAS France SAS. He joined his parents' family firm in Harsewinkel in 1958. Here he applied himself initially to his particular area of expertise, which was engineering.

In 1962 he was made Managing Director. Helmut Claas accepted the position of Personally Liable Partner when the company was reconstituted as a general partnership in 1978. In 1996, as part of the restructuring of the firm into a joint-stock company, he changed from the role of Managing Director to the position of Chairman of both the Supervisory Board and the Shareholders' Committee.

His special focus was always on developing pioneering products and mass-producing them economically. During his era, following the success of the combine harvester model DOMINATOR, came the completely new combine harvester construction the LEXION, which is today the most efficient combine harvester in the world. Also, the JAGUAR forage harvester and the large tractor XERION were developed under Helmut Claas, author of the success story.

In 2003 he succeeded in taking an important step towards the company's future: CLAAS took over the complete tractor business from Renault Agriculture in France. In other respects, too, internationalisation continued to progress with the establishment and expansion of production sites in Russia, the USA and China.

Four internationally renowned universities in Hungary, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria and Germany awarded honorary doctorates (Dr. h. c.) to Helmut Claas. It was in the year 2000 that he received the honorary title of 'Doctor of Agricultural Science' from the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim. It was this university that also made him an Honorary Senator in 2004.

In June 2009 the Goryachkin University in Moscow bestowed an honorary professorship upon him. Also in 2009, Helmut Claas was made a Knight of the French Legion of Honour in recognition of his efforts as a pioneer of Franco-German cooperation. In November 2013, Helmut Claas was finally inducted

into the Hall of Fame of American Equipment Manufacturers (AEM). An important highlight was the awarding of the Diesel medal by the German Institute of Inventions in 2017.

Personal awards, such as honorary citizenship of his home town of Harsewinkel, Germany, the Medal of Merit of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, as well as the Order of Merit of the French Agriculture Minister, round off his life's work.

Helmut Claas was first and foremost a farmer. He ran a farm in East Anglia in Great Britain and often stayed there with his wife, Erika. He enjoyed keeping in touch with farmers in the neighbourhood and took a keen interest in issues concerning agricultural firms. He also had a passion for hunting.

And he had long since taken care of the ongoing development of the family business, as the next generation has already taken over the running of the CLAAS Group. Today, consequently, his daughter, Cathrina Claas-Mühlhäuser, manages the decision-making and development of the successful group of companies.

The death of Helmut Claas leaves behind a space in the world of agricultural technology that cannot be filled. His family, all the shareholders, the Group Executive Board, and the staff are mourning the passing of a great personality and will continue to develop the CLAAS Group as he would have wished.

About CLAAS

CLAAS (www.claas.com) is a family business founded in 1913 and one of the world's leading manufacturers of agricultural machinery. The company, with corporate headquarters in Harsewinkel, Germany, is the European market leader in combine harvesters. CLAAS is the world leader in another large product group, self-propelled forage harvesters. CLAAS is also a top performer in agricultural technology worldwide, with its tractors, agricultural balers and green harvesting machinery. The CLAAS product portfolio also includes state-of-the-art farming information technology. CLAAS employs around 11,400 workers worldwide and had a reported a turnover of 4.0 billion euros in the 2020 financial year.

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