

Update on the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program

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The Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) program implemented by the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) and the American Registry for Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops, and Soils (ARCPACS) through the cooperation of various state and regional boards will soon begin its second year. To date approximately 2100 people have taken the state and/or national exams and are in the process of completing the other requirements for certification. Several new state or multi-state CCA Boards have been organized in the past few months and the National CCA Coordinating Council has been appointed and held its first meeting in Washington, DC, on October 2-3.

Significant steps have been taken in the past few months to firmly establish the CCA program as the official recognized accreditation system for those making recommendations for nutrient and pest management in North America. The first step was the establishment of the CCA program by the American Registry of Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops, and Soils (ARCPACS). This was followed by the establishment of state boards through a nomination process that ensured the support of various state government agencies along with university and industry agronomists in the state. The strong response of the field practitioners in taking the exams and applying for certification was the next major step.

As these three steps were taking place, efforts to gain national recognition in U.S. and Canadian government agencies have been moving forward. The USDA Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS) officially endorsed the program and provided some funding for implementation. More recently, ARCPACS and ASA leaders have been successful in gaining support from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Establishment of the CCA program is also getting underway in Canada, but has not developed as much as the program in the U.S. at this time. Efforts are underway to help inform the regional and state/provincial officials of these agencies about the CCA program and confirm their support for it.

The positive response of those whom the CCA program is intended to certify has been the most important factor in gaining recognition for the CCA program. It proves that the field practitioners are serious about increasing the professionalism of their industry and that they are willing to work to maintain their technical competence for helping farmers prepare management plans.

The "selling" of the CCA program continues with the goal of getting it established in all states and provinces. Individual Boards are promoting the program locally to gain a high percentage of involvement on a voluntary basis. We still hope to keep the program voluntary as much as possible. That will require "selling" to congressional and legislative leaders to convince them that the CCA program is legitimate and meets their demands for environmentally responsible decision-making relative to nutrient and pest management. Popular support from environmental interest groups and the general public must also be gained for the program to be successful. Progress has been made toward this goal as well.

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The organizational structure of ARCPACS is being reorganized, along with a probable name change, and the position of the CCA program relative to the ARCPACS professional certification programs will be more clearly defined. Details of these changes will be discussed in detail at the 1993 American Society of Agronomy and ARCPACS Board Meetings in Cincinnati in early November.

By the end of 1994, it is anticipated that the number of CCA-certified field practitioners will be between 5,000 and 7,000 and growing as more state/provincial/regional programs are established.

As the CCA examination and credential reviews get fully underway, continuing education programs are also being implemented. Accumulation of continuing education credits is required to maintain certification under CCA. Details of this requirement are being worked out by the National CCA Coordinating Council and were a major part of the agenda of their first meeting.

Results of the exams given in February and August of 1993 have been analyzed by professionals of Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, NJ. They report that the exams have proven to meet the standards established for other certification examination procedures. They can be effective in determining whether an individual has met the performance objectives established by the CCA program. Pass rates for the national CCA exam have been just under 70 percent.

Public and private training programs are being established for the CCA program. They range from classes to prepare for passing the exam to in-depth training programs for continuing education. We hope to see organized curricula established to provide a structured continuing education plan for keeping field practitioners up to date on research and technical information and on regulations related to their business.

The public education process must continue as well to gain and maintain public confidence in the CCA program. We hope to involve non-agriculture people to help design these programs. We need them to understand that we do have a system in place to ensure that those making nutrient and pest management recommendations and decisions are properly trained and subscribe to an established code of ethics to recommend only products and rates that are necessary for optimum profitability to the farmer without adversely affecting the quality of the environment or the safety of the food produced.

In Illinois, and probably other states, interest in CCA certification has been expressed by professional farm managers and some farmers. Farm Managers often make recommendations for farms they manage; farmers see the CCA certification as a potential competitive edge when trying to rent land. The Illinois Department of Agriculture has been getting phone calls from farmers and landowners asking for lists of dealers and consultants who are certified under the CCA program.

The CCA program is positioned to offer the public and the farmer the kind of technical advice and responsible environmental protection they need---and demand---for today's crop management systems. While certification does not guarantee performance, it does provide a means of assuring minimum education and experience criteria have been met. It is a very positive step for our industry toward meeting farmers' and society's needs for the future.

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