



What is a CCA?

By Susan Fitzgerald, *Executive Director, Ontario*

There have been many excellent agronomic articles in this space over the past two years written by CCAs, however many readers may not be aware of who or what the CCA program represents.

The Certified Crop Adviser Program (CCA) is a voluntary certification program which seeks to set a base standard of agronomy expertise for individuals who provide agronomic guidance to growers through testing and documented field experience, then raising that standard through continuing education.

Technology, regulations, environment and consumer demand all create a growing need for efficient and responsible agronomic practices. We all know that efficient and responsible agronomic practices have a positive impact on the farm economy and on the image of today's agriculture. Inefficient or misguided practices will have the opposite effect. As consumers become more concerned about food safety and the environment, the techniques of modern growers are increasingly in the public eye. CCAs are there to supply consistent and scientifically based information to farmers and the agriculture industry.

Achieving the CCA designation is not an easy process:

Experience

Certification requires at least two years of documented crop advising experience with grower references.

Exams

CCAs must pass two comprehensive exams covering nutrient management, soil and water management, integrated pest management and crop management.

Continuing Education

In order to maintain their CCA designation, they must earn 40 hours of accredited continuing education every two years. This helps ensure that CCAs always have the latest information on new technology and industry developments.

Ethics

CCAs must sign and adhere to a code of ethics, meaning they always focus on grower profitability while optimizing and protecting natural resources.

The CCA program is administered within a state, region, or province by a local Board of Directors. The Ontario Board consists of representatives from government (federal and provincial), agricultural research, agri-business, and practicing Certified Crop Advisers. The only states and provinces not yet directly involved are Alaska, Quebec, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon. Discussions are ongoing with the state and provinces not yet involved and other countries, such as Mexico and Argentina, as interest in joining the CCA Program continues to grow.

The total number of CCAs certified internationally since the program began in 1991 is 14,869. The program was first introduced in Ontario in 1996 and there have been over 500 Ontario CCAs certified in this province since that time, truly commendable for a voluntary program.

Awarding Excellence

In 2003, the Ontario CCA Board announced the CCA Award of Excellence to recognize one of these 500 CCAs each year who delivers exemplary customer service. The award was designed to recognize a crop adviser who delivers exceptional customer service, is highly innovative, has shown that they are a leader in their field, and has contributed substantially to the exchange of ideas and the transfer of



agronomic knowledge within the agriculture industry. Kirk Patterson, consulting agronomist with Scotland Agromart, was this year's recipient of the Ontario CCA Award of Excellence.

Kirk has played an instrumental role in developing the agronomic services that Scotland Agromart offers its customers. He has implemented unique crop-scouting programs for potatoes and ginseng and oversees a team that conducts regular crop scouting exercises and soil sampling. Kirk is also responsible for applying custom fertility programs that include fertility management, cultural practices, and maximum nutrient uptake to facilitate growers in producing high quality marketable crops.

Kirk's approach to sustainable agriculture has helped in averting potential environmental problems through rigorous soil testing and methodical site selection processes. This has added greatly in directing crop inputs in a positive economic and environmental manner.

The CCA Award of Excellence was presented to Kirk Patterson on January 12, 2005 at the CCA Conference and Annual Meeting in Niagara Falls before 200 of his peers. The Award is jointly sponsored by Syngenta Crop Protection and CropLife Canada – Ontario Council.



There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower's interests first.

This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice.