When most people think about CCAs, they probably think of professionals who advise farmers on growing crops like corn, cotton, soybeans, and wheat. However, in Highlands County in central Florida, citrus crops are the main commodities, and CCAs have to be able to serve this unique clientele.

One of these CCAs is Tim Hurner, who was named the 2013 International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) of the Year. Hurner traveled to Tampa, FL in early November to receive the award during the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America. He gets high praise from growers and peers.

“Hurner is very deserving (of this award), he is knowledgeable and helpful, and he has dedicated his life to this mission of educating citrus growers,” says Stanley Perry, citrus grower from Venus, FL, who has interacted with Hurner on a regular basis through extension programing.

Susie Bishop, Executive Director of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District, agrees. She says Hurner’s work has benefited the entire agricultural community, not just citrus growers. She first met Hurner when she was a 4-H member when he accompanied her Florida 4-H group to a national public speaking contest. Hurner and Bishop would later work together in developing a best management practices manual for commodity crops in Florida.

“He is a dedicated and passionate professional and willing to help others, and his passion and enthusiasm is contagious,” she says.

When asked about winning the award, Hurner says “I was blown away by this honor. And while I appreciate receiving it, being a CCA has helped me immensely in my career as a citrus specialist to farmers. The CCA program is important, not just to farmers, but also to consumers who are more environmentally conscious and are demanding that we protect the environment.”

Hurner begin his career in the Highlands County extension office, starting as the 4-H and citrus agent in 1965 and serving there for 30 years. He graduated from the University of Florida, receiving both his B.S. and M.S. degrees in fruit crops with an emphasis on citrus production. Along the way, he was an extension educator, director, an administrator; and then retired in 1995 to teach citrus production at South Florida Community College and Florida Southern College. In 2007, he was lured back to his extension role in Highlands County as citrus greening began to impact local citrus groves. “I came back to do what I did in the very beginning of my career—citrus management and working with growers.”

Hurner views his career as being a teacher first and foremost. “I have taught farmers and students, and my goal has always been to get them to understand and keep up to date on the latest information. And I have always tried to get farmers to adopt the best technology. We have to educate them and demonstrate what the best practices are for today. I always promoted putting out plots and then taking small groups of farmers to visit them. When they see it, they are much more likely to adopt a new idea themselves.”

Hurner again retired from extension at the end of 2012 and started his consulting business, “The Citrus Advisor,” and now works as a private consultant. After he left extension, his daughter Laurie filled his position as citrus agent in Highlands County in 2013. Both Hurners have dedicated their careers to working with citrus producers in Florida.

CCA continuing education

Tim Hurner was one of Florida’s original CCAs, becoming certified in 1998. “I have been very involved in our CCA program since the beginning and continue to promote its value. We can’t put a dollar value on the CCA program, but it works, and producers know that it helps their