The 11th Annual Ontario CCA Conference and Annual Meeting was held on Jan. 15 and 16, 2014 in London, ON. Attendees heard presentations by 12 different speakers on a wide range of topics including: the role of soil biology in agricultural productivity and carbon sequestration, time management for agri-business success, herbicide resistance, drought stress genetics and climate change risks, possible effects of pesticide use on pollinator health, and the outlook for corn, soybeans, and wheat for 2014.

More than 250 people attended the event with 225 CCAs being present for the Annual Meeting portion of the program, which is more than 50% of the Ontario membership. This level of participation is very heartening and shows strong support for the program.

I noted when giving my Executive Director’s report that the first CCA exam was offered in Ontario in April 1996, almost 18 years ago. The program expanded very quickly in Ontario, and it was estimated back then that the number of CCAs would stabilize around 500, which is about where we are at now at 525 active CCAs. We typically saw around 50 new people register for the exams each year for the past several years, and then last year, we saw a slight increase to 74. We were very surprised to have 93 people register to write the exams this February. This is very encouraging, as it shows new people are not only entering the industry, but also seeing value in the CCA designation.

Comments from the Ontario Board Chair

Murray Van Zeggelaar, the Ontario Board Chair, opened the conference and reviewed some of the key activities from 2013. He particularly noted the results of the ICCA survey, pointing to CCAs’ satisfaction with the program and the services they receive. The response from Ontario CCAs was very good with 103 Ontario CCAs completing the survey, which equates to roughly 20% of our membership. However, the message that is loud and clear from the survey results is that we continue to fall short of our membership’s expectations in the area of building awareness of the CCA program (60% importance, 25% satisfaction).

Murray noted that this too is a concern of his as a CCA, and one of his main objectives when becoming chair last year was to raise the awareness level of the CCA program among farmers. This is our target audience, and the CCA program will become more valuable to CCAs when farmers see the value of working with them. However, Murray emphasized that traditional advertising and marketing campaigns are very expensive, and we work with a very limited marketing budget, so he called on CCAs to do their part.

He noted that CCAs are their own best marketers and, collectively, can raise awareness of the value of the program and the CCA designation. Whenever there is an opportunity, CCAs should be letting their customers know they are a CCA. When writing an article, include the CCA designation after your name. Make sure that your CCA designation is on your business cards. Talk about the program in your agronomy newsletters. Encourage your employer to have a CCA logo on their company website. Individually, these are all small things, but done over time and done repetitively by all of us, they can have a big impact.

Ontario CCA Award of Excellence winner

The conference is also the venue for the presentation of the annual CCA Award of Excellence. This year’s winner was Pat Lynch. Pat has been involved in agriculture for more than 40 years. He started off at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food as a soil and crop specialist

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