Meet Andy Knepp:
New ICCA vice chair

For Andy Knepp, a career in agronomy came about gradually. There was no epiphany or “aha moment.” After looking at various options and talking with many people, he decided agronomy could provide an area of study that would satisfy his childhood interest in biology. Once he settled on agronomy, he took steps along the path that would get him closer to a career in the field including classes, internships, and undergraduate research projects. Along that path, he also learned of the CCA program.

“My first awareness of the CCA program was while I was in college,” Knepp says. “I was part of the Field and Furrow Club at the University of Illinois, and we had a guest speaker mention it.”

The speaker gave the students two pieces of advice. The first was to become certified. The second was to stay in school and earn an advanced degree. Knepp followed through on both, finishing his master’s degree in weed science at the University of Illinois in 2000 and becoming certified in 2001. He has become more and more involved with the program ever since, and this year he will serve as the International CCA (ICCA) vice chair.

Day to day, Knepp works at Monsanto and has held various agronomic and research roles for the last 10 years. He currently leads a team of researchers who provide the final stages of product evaluation and characterization prior to commercial release.

“As my career has evolved, I don’t get as many opportunities to work one-on-one making recommendations to farmers,” Knepp explains. “But [this position] still allows me to keep one hand in the fire in terms of what’s going on in the field.”

Also keeping him involved is Knepp’s engagement in the CCA program. He became a member of the Illinois CCA board in 2007, where he is finishing out his term as chair. His experience on the Illinois board allowed him to represent the state at the North American board meeting from 2012 to 2014, and his expanding role led to a spot on the ICCA board in 2013 and his current position as vice chair.

For Knepp, his involvement with the boards and his opportunity to network with expanding circles of people are some of the benefits of the CCA program at this point in his career. Earlier in his career, Knepp enjoyed the extra credibility that came along with his certification. It was another way for him to demonstrate his knowledge beyond his education. As he progresses in his career, however, he sees a huge benefit in the opportunities to interact with people of varied backgrounds and knowledge bases.

“The value and benefits of certification change as your career changes,” Knepp says. “It’s also what you make out of it. I’ve really chosen to become involved, so it’s created a lot of opportunities for me to build a much stronger professional network outside of the people I interact with on a daily basis at work.” At times, he says, the program is faced with individuals who question the value of their certification. In Knepp’s mind, that question is sometimes best answered by asking what value the CCA is actively trying to get out of it.

Moving the CCA program forward

Going forward as the ICCA incoming vice chair, Knepp hopes to create even more opportunities for CCAs to realize the many merits of the program. When asked about his goals, he smiles as he first mentions that he doesn’t want to sound overly ambitious. He then talks about three