Sustainability, specifically in agricultural production, is growing, and no, it is not a passing fad. If you work with growers who are closer to the end-user (consumer) such as a processor or food company, then you know this to be true. Growers farther removed from the consumer may not be as readily aware but will be in the coming months. Certified Crop Advisers are being viewed as having a central part to play in helping their grower clients meet sustainability objectives. So when a food company or retailer makes a statement that their raw ingredients or products they source will be 20% sustainable, how do CCAs respond? Your clients will soon be asking you if you can help them meet the sustainable requirements that their buyer is seeking. There needs to be a way to identify professionals with the knowledge and skills to help growers meet their objectives, and there will be soon.

The ICCA Program is working on a specialty certification in sustainability. This project is in partnership with the United Soybean Board (USB), but it is not commodity specific. The development team is made up of individuals from agribusiness, input manufacturers, food companies, commodity groups, farmers, CCAs, CPAGs, CPSS's, government agencies, and universities. The team met at the American Society of Agronomy headquarters, home to the ICCA program, in February to draft the performance objectives (POs), outline the certification requirements, and identify the exam questions writing team. A goal is to offer the first exam on Feb. 5, 2016.

Certified Crop Advisers will have the option to earn the specialty certification, and this will allow farmers and the public to identify CCAs with the knowledge and skills to help implement sustainable practices. The first requirement of the specialty certification is to already have a CCA certification. Once the exam is completed, there will be a continuing education requirement. The total of 40 CEUs every two years will not change, but there will be a category requirement so that knowledge in sustainable production continues to grow.

Some of the comments coming from the development team members reinforced the need for ICCA to do this. Economic advantage was mentioned leading to increased profitability when producers adopt more sustainable practices. These are CCAs and other professionals already involved with sustainable production and helping growers meet the challenge. It was widely held that some of the practices being used today by farmers would be considered sustainable, but no one knows that because it hasn’t been documented. Part of meeting sustainable standards

Outreach and staffing
ASA and ICCA have made some changes in staffing. Eric Welsh, who is focused on outreach for the certification and education programs, has an expanded role now. Eric will also be building relationships with businesses. He will continue to build on what he was doing with the certification and education programs but will also include ASA, SSSA, and CSSA. He will help businesses better understand the value of partnering with the Societies. Please contact Eric to suggest whom he should talk with at your organization and to learn more about what he is doing: ewelsh@sciencesocieties.org.