Certification
Students: Separate Yourself from the Pack

Did you know that you do not have to wait until after graduation to become certified? Did you also know being certified or at least being on the path to certification will make you even more appealing to employers? Yes, employers value professional certification, and it will separate you from the masses of candidates.

But what exactly is certification? According to *The Business of Certification* by Knapp + Associates International, certification is “a voluntary process, by which an organization grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications or standards.” ASA and SSSA both have voluntary certification programs in their respective professions. Both also have credentialing status within the certification for students who can meet all of the standards except experience.

ASA’s largest agronomy certification is the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA). You can sit for the exams in your senior year and submit your application. If you pass the exams and complete the application but do not have all or any of the experience yet, you can request CCA–Candidate status. Farming and internships count towards your experience, meaning that you have met or will meet all of the requirements including experience in the near future. Employers love this because it shows that you can meet the standards set by the profession and are committed to it. Once you earn the experience, you then resubmit your experience form, and the board will move you to full certification status. As a CCA–Candidate, you do not have to earn continuing education or pay annual maintenance fees, but you are plugged into the CCA network.

SSSA’s certification program is the Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS). CFSS has an Associate status similar to the CCA–Candidate status, but it is slightly different. There are two exams for CPSS—fundamentals and professional practice. You can sit for the fundamentals exam while in your senior year, but you need to earn the minimum of five years of experience before you can sit for the professional practice exam. During the time between exams, while earning experience, you will be an Associate Professional Soil Scientist (APSS). Once you pass the professional practice exam and meet all of the experience requirements, the board will move you to full certified status.

ASA and SSSA set the standards through their certification boards. These standards are what your professional peers believe are the most important elements that someone needs to know to successfully practice the profession in order to protect it and the public.

What does it mean to protect the profession and the public? Certification and licensing programs are typically developed out of a need to improve the level of performance coming from a specific practice. Poor performance can damage the reputation of a profession or even cause major damage and, in some cases, loss of life. The certification process is attempting to mitigate poor performance by preventing individuals who cannot meet the standards from practicing the profession. In doing so, they are also protecting the public.

That is why employers can rely on certification as a risk management tool. Certification points out those professionals who should be able to perform at the levels the employer needs and wants. Some companies have adopted certification as part of their culture and only employ and advance certified professionals. Some have also told me that they track performance and see their certified professionals outperforming those who are not certified. So you can see why it is important and why it will set you apart when seeking employment or advancing through your professional life. It will also connect you with others in the profession who are also striving to do their best in serving their customers and clients. Don’t wait until after graduation—take some time to check out professional certification: [www.certifiedcropadviser.org/about-the-program](http://www.certifiedcropadviser.org/about-the-program) and [www.soils.org/certifications/become-certified](http://www.soils.org/certifications/become-certified).