The certification programs of ASA and SSSA—Certified Crop Adviser (CCA), Certified Professional Agronomist (CPAg), and Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS)—are intended to set a certain level of professionalism. They do this by developing standards for knowledge and skills or competencies, thereby designing a profession while creating a win–win condition for the participants. There are three primary groups who benefit from certification: the customer/client, employer, and certified professional.

**Customer/Clients**

A customer buys something from a professional while a client involves the professional in his/her business decisions, receives and expects advice, and considers the professional to be part of their team. Certified professionals typically have clients who manage their risk by working with the certified professional because he/she has met the standards set by the profession, which provides a level of assurance for competency. They receive better quality advice and a higher degree of performance along with knowing that the certified professional is engaged in lifelong learning and has signed a code of ethics.

**Employer**

The employer benefits in some of the same ways. Certified professionals, as measured by a major seed company, outperform non-certified professionals, which should yield higher revenue. Certification also helps to manage the employer’s risk exposure by validating knowledge with an assurance of competency. To be certified, an individual must meet exam, education, experience and ethics requirements supported with references—a far more rigorous method than most employment processes. Employers can rely on the certification to identify and validate quality applicants and can also use the credential as part of their promotion and advancement practices. The employee who is certified must meet professional practice standards including continuing education. Adding this to the company’s own performance standards will strengthen the overall process for future leaders.

**Certified Professional**

The certified professional benefits through increased job opportunities, advancement potential, and performance that can all lead to economic gain. However, making more money was never the intended goal of the certification programs when they started. It was about increasing the level of professionalism and improving the quality of performance so all stakeholders benefit. In fact, when our certified professionals are asked why they become certified or maintain their certification, the number one reason cited is that it “conveys professionalism.” They became certified because they wanted to be the best they could be in their service to others. Yet, when you consider all of the other benefits already discussed, economic gain becomes a natural result without it being the primary objective.

Certification is voluntary, so it is up to individuals to obtain and maintain it even though their employers might support and require it. It is not a license that a governmental body oversees that is required to perform a designated practice. Voluntary programs tend to be stronger than mandatory ones, but both have their inherent strengths and weaknesses. When you volunteer to do something, it shows a desire, an interest, and drive that may not be there if you are required or forced to do it. That desire is evident in the professionals who decide to become certified and maintain it over the years. It’s not an easy process, but they want to do it. And it sets them apart from the others who perform similar types of work.