Certification

Agronomy and Soils Certification

by Luther Smith

The following is a quick review of ASA’s International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) Program and SSSA’s Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS) Program as well as an update on the CCA specialty certifications.

Certification is a voluntary process by which an organization grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications or standards. Certification defines the profession through standards.

The value that one finds in certification may differ among individuals, employers, or clients, but it generally falls within one or more of the following five categories: creditability, opportunities, motivation, ability, and validation. Anyone can say they are a crop adviser or soil scientist, but ASA says a CCA is a Certified Crop Adviser and SSSA says that CPSS is a Certified Professional Soil Scientist. That’s a validation of the person’s abilities and knowledge by a respected professional and scientific organization.

The value of being certified is also reinforced by the increasing requests from other organizations to work with a certified professional and/or the program. These organizations span the scope of government agencies, conservation and environmental groups, and private companies. It’s a true testament to the professionals who are certified and their commitment to their clientele.

There are currently 808 CPSS’s and/or CPSC’s (Soil Classifiers), up slightly from 2016. The CPSS program has implemented some changes over the past several years—modified CEU requirements, lowering the total from 40 to 30; the addition of a new certification, Certified Soil Technician (CST); and no longer requiring the professional practices exam for CPSS. Visit www.soils.org/certifications/become-certified for more details regarding CPSS or CST.

There are 13,357 CCAs in North America. The program is active in all three countries—USA, Canada, and Mexico, with the vast majority in the USA where the program began almost 25 years ago. The program has had about a 1% continuous growth over the past five years.

Specialty Certifications

The CCA specialties that were more recently added continue to grow. There are 357 4R Nutrient Management Specialists (4RNMS), and beginning in 2018, this specialty will be available in all of the states in the eastern USA and Ontario. The northwestern USA and western Canada will be working on the specialty for a 2019 release. There are 98 Sustainability Specialists (SSp) and 73 Resistance Management Specialists (RMS). Both of these specialty certifications began in August 2016, so they have not been available for quite as long as the 4RNMS, but they did begin with a national scope whereas 4RNMS started in six states. The Certified Professional Agronomist (CPAg) is currently at 479 individuals. You can learn more about these specialties and the program in general at www.certifiedcropadviser.org.

A new CCA specialty is under development in Precision Ag. The goal is to bring the technological and agronomic knowledge together for a CCA who advises farmers on this topic. This specialty should be ready for either the August 2018 or February 2019 CCA exams. The development team is currently working on the performance objectives that will guide development of the exam questions.

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