

CCA Application Requirements: Proposed Motions, June 2026

The CCA Application Task Force

The background information and proposed motions below were created by the CCA Application Task Force, which began meeting monthly starting in 2025.

The Task Force members include Sterling Clifton, Mary Harney, Karen Corrigan, Noah Goza, Aaron Breimer, and Jason Hartschuh.

Background

Over the past several years, the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) program has experienced a steady decline in new applicants, alongside the continued retirement of long-standing certificants. At the same time, fewer undergraduate students are receiving agronomy degrees, with more prospective candidates entering the workforce through adjacent disciplines (e.g., environmental science, agribusiness) that may not align cleanly with existing application requirements.

In response, the ICCA Application Task Force was convened in 2025 to evaluate whether the current certification process continues to appropriately balance rigor, accessibility, and relevance to today's workforce. Across multiple discussions, the group consistently affirmed that the strength of the CCA program must remain grounded in demonstrated agronomic knowledge, sound decision-making, and professional integrity. At the same time, the task force identified several aspects of the current application process that create unnecessary barriers, administrative burden, or inconsistency across boards without materially strengthening the quality of certified advisers.

The proposed motions reflect a focused effort to modernize, not dilute, the certification process. Specifically, they aim to:

- **Maintain rigor where it matters most**, emphasizing the CCA exams, verified experience, and demonstrated agronomic decision-making as the core measures of competency.

- **Reduce friction and improve the user experience in the application process** by eliminating or simplifying requirements (e.g., letters of reference, coursework documentation, detailed worksheets) that are time-intensive but add limited evaluative value.
- **Improve consistency and defensibility** across local boards through clearer definitions of acceptable experience and streamlined, auditable verification methods.
- **Enable full digitization of the application system**, which is not feasible under the current multi-step, document-heavy process and limits the program's ability to efficiently track, support, and convert candidates.
- **Create a more supportive pathway from exam completion to certification**, allowing better engagement with individuals who have already demonstrated core competency but may not complete the process under current structures.

Importantly, these recommendations are paired with strengthened auditing and verification mechanisms to ensure that simplifying the process does not compromise program integrity. The intent is not to lower standards, but to ensure that standards are applied in ways that are clear, defensible, and aligned with the realities of today's agronomic workforce.

Collectively, these changes position the CCA program to remain rigorous, relevant, and sustainable, ensuring that the next generation of advisers can enter the profession while upholding the high standards for which the program is known.

CCA Application Requirements: Proposed Motions

1) **Candidate Status:** As soon as an individual passes all their exams and signs the Code of Ethics, they will become a CCA Candidate.

a. **Reduce Friction/Improve User Experience:** They will no longer have to apply to be a candidate and will have the same 5 years to complete their application including necessary experience

b. **More Supportive Pathway:** This will allow better tracking and engagement of individuals who have passed the exam to support them in completing their certification (e.g. a new CCA Candidate could immediately be assigned to their local board, allowing better outreach and connection from the time they pass their exams until they become a certified CCA).

2) **References:** Replace the requirement for two letters of reference with contact information for two references.

a. **Consistency and Defensibility:** These contacts could be contacted by evaluators OR a percentage of candidates are audited, with evaluators contacted by ASA Headquarters or the local board. Within a digital application system, both ASA Headquarters and local boards could audit in a system to ensure the same reference is not contacted by both.

b. **Reduce Friction/Improve User Experience:** One of the goals of this task force was to make the process of completing the certification process easier. Instead of requiring the candidate to provide reference letters, supplying contact information for employers will make the process much easier.

c. **Digitization:** Makes it easier to digitize the application process

3) **Experience:** Farm experience will be limited to making or recommending agronomic decisions on a farm.

a. **Defensibility:** The current policy in the CCA Policy Manual related to on-farm experience reads, “If an applicant has farm experience, this experience may count up to one year of CCA work experience regardless of experience duration.” This policy does

not specify that any agronomic decision-making is required for farm experience to count. Motions 3 and 4 seek to clarify this.

b. **Maintain Rigor:** Growing up on a farm should not count, by default, as farm experience. The applicant must demonstrate that they have made production agronomic decisions, such as disease and insect scouting, replanting, fertility, precision ag application map creation, yield data analysis, and planting timing, for example.

c. **Decrease Friction:** Along with motion 5, requiring a detailed explanation of agronomic decisions made on-farm — whether it's a family farm or through work experience — could count toward the applicant's experience requirement.

4) **Farm Experience:** Farm experience may count for up to 50% of a candidate's experience requirement provided that this farm experience included making or recommending agronomic decisions on a farm.

a. **Current Policy:** "If an applicant has farm experience, this experience may count up to one year of CCA work experience regardless of experience duration."

b. **Defensibility:** The current phrasing is not clear and has been interpreted differently by boards. Growing up on a farm, for example, has been counted in the past for up to one year of experience. This motion seeks to clarify that all experience requirements must include on-farm advising, regardless of source or the applicant's background.

c. **Maintain Rigor:** This will also help maintain the rigor of the experience requirement. Since this is an adviser position, they need to have not only the knowledge and experience of making agronomic decisions, but also advising a client on those decisions, which would not come from personal farm experience.

5) **Experience Statement:** Replace experience calculation worksheets with a detailed statement on the amount of on-farm advising experience they have obtained

a. **Reduce Friction/Improve User Experience:** Purpose is to streamline the approach so a digital application portal can be created. There would also be an outline of what must be included in the candidate's experience statement and an example answer for candidates to reference.

6) **CEUs and Experience:** CCA Candidates requiring more than two years of experience may earn Board Approved CEUs to reduce their experience requirement to a minimum of two years.

- a. **More supportive pathway:** For candidates requiring three or more years of advising experience, Board Approved CEUs may be applied as experience to their certification, with 40 CEUs counting toward one year of experience. The Task Force recommended counting 40 CEUs for one year of experience to align with the FFA CCA Apprentice program, while full CCAs will still need just 20 CEUs/year to maintain their certification. The goal of this change is to allow a more supportive pathway for candidates from non-agronomic backgrounds to become a CCA, while rewarding motivation and interest in learning more about the agronomic sciences through continuing education.
- b. **Maintain rigor:** Feedback from the board in March 2026 heavily favoured the importance of demonstrating actual agronomic knowledge to reduce the amount of experience required – this addresses the actual agronomic knowledge as this is the same sessions that fully certified CCA’s are required to attend to maintain their knowledge and certification.
- c. **Consistency and Defensibility:** This would mirror the FFA CCA Apprentice program where 6 months of experience is given for completion of the Foundations of Agronomy course, which counts for 20 CEUs upon completion.
- d. **Maintain rigor:** All candidates will still be required to demonstrate at least two years of advising experience before becoming a fully certified CCA. The table, below, outlines how CEUs could be applied to experience required.

Degree Earned	Base Advising Experience Requirement	Advising Experience Required with 40 CEUs Earned	Advising Experience Required with 80 CEUs Earned
HS Diploma	4 years	3 years	2 years
Associate’s or Baccalaureate - non-agronomic science or unrelated field	4 years	3 years	2 years
Associate’s Degree -	3 years	2 years	2 years

Agronomic Science			
Baccalaureate - Agronomic science	2 years	2 years	2 years

7) **Degree Type:** All four-year science degrees or higher will require two years of advising experience. All four-year degrees in non-science disciplines (e.g. Bachelor of Arts) will require three years of advising experience.

a. **More Supportive Pathway:** This change would create a clearer pathway for those who did not receive an agronomy degree to become CCA Candidates.

b. **Consistency and Defensibility:** The Task Force found that few applicants list “Agronomy” as their degree. With the current paper application system, tracking the degrees listed is difficult. Anecdotally, one Task Force member reported that of the six applicants they just reviewed, only two were agronomy or plant science degree earners. The others included sustainable agriculture, agribusiness, animal science, and sustainable plant systems. One candidate did not have a science degree, earning their baccalaureate in business administration. There are also examples of potential CCAs deciding not to continue the process when they learn of the degree requirements, though they may have been excellent CCAs.

8) **Course Work:** CCA Candidates must submit an official or unofficial transcript.

a. **Reduce Friction/Improve User Experience:** Applications will no longer have to fill out a list of courses for reviewers to read through and guess what was really taught in that course. For those who do not have a readily available list of courses they took, this will decrease the challenges they face completing the application.

b. **More Supportive Pathway:** This change will create a clearer pathway for both applications and reviewers, eliminating challenges caused by different university naming conventions for every class.