Science Societies

Kramer named 2020 ICCA of the Year

By Denice Rackley

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2020 CCA of the Year Adam Kramer with his son, Ezra, working in a sweet corn patch.

Each year, an exceptional CCA who stands out for his or her use of knowledge, innovation, and leadership skills to serve and educate customers receives the honor of being named International CCA of Year. This year, that honor belongs to Iowa CCA Adam Kramer, who is making a significant impact with innovative solutions that combine food production with land stewardship.

“Adam Kramer embodies what the International Certified Crop Advisor should be. He is a leader in agronomic management who is always looking for the next cutting-edge method that can help his clients improve profitability,” says CCA Daniel H. Smith, agronomist with the University of Wisconsin's Nutrient and Pest Management Program.

A childhood that town kids only dream of—climbing fences to swing onto the back of horses, fishing in ponds, cooking over a campfire, and hunting—Kramer grew up in rural Iowa on his family's farm. “We didn't come inside until dark, and sometimes not even then. In Neola, most everyone was involved in agriculture. That is where I gained respect for the land and the people who worked it.”

At Iowa State University, Kramer majored in agricultural studies and minored in agronomy. He recalls many who had a hand in his college success. “I worked in the greenhouse at Agronomy Hall during college; all the professors and teaching assistances were very supportive, taking their time to answer questions. They all encouraged me to work hard, study, and make the most of my time.”

The use of science and technology to advance soil health, a deep commitment to environmental stewardship, and dedication to the success of his clients are the cornerstones of Kramer's career.

“Pushing new practices and paradigms has been at the heart of Adam's efforts from very early in his career as a crop adviser,” notes Dr. Lance Gibson, CCA and Agronomy Training Manager with Corteva Agriscience. In 2005, while working in Monona, IA for United Cooperative, Kramer supported converting to grid sampling and variable-rate (VR) fertilizer application. Knowing the science was there to support VR fertilizer application, the resulting cost savings to farmers, and the environmental benefits, Kramer worked with SST Software in Stillwater, OK, on an algorithm to automate VR application based on university recommendations. The algorithm used crop suitability along with yield history and goals and focused on the greatest yield-limiting factors. Multi-year recommendations were then built to provide the greatest return on investment.

Kramer, who became a CCA in 2006, believes the continuing education needed to maintain certification requires CCAs to take the time to maintain a well-rounded education, staying up to date on the latest agriculture information. “Certification adds credibility. I would like to see CCA certification as the standard for every crop adviser.”

Kramer holds CCA certification in Wisconsin and Iowa, served on the Iowa CCA board from 2015 to 2017, and was selected as the 2019 Iowa CCA of the Year. He currently works with growers in the Driftless Area in Iowa and Wisconsin. Black Sand Granary of Patch Grove, WI is the culmination of the last 15 years of Kramer's experience and knowledge, providing a union of ideologies under one roof. “It is our mission to integrate the goals of good land stewardship and food production for growers seeking elevated ROI through partnership with our company. We focus on the right products, services, strategies, and continuing education to provide a conduit between industry and the farm gate.”

Soil Health: The Foundation for Success

“Adam is a leader in agronomic management whose recommendations are strongly rooted in research-based, unbiased sources,” Smith says. Focusing on soil health as the foundation for success, Kramer collects data that assists each farmer in making decisions for long-term improvements. The analysis of hard data leads Kramer to suggest specific practices fitted to each farm that will build organic matter, increase water infiltration and retention, and limit nutrient loss, erosion, and compaction as well as break up pest cycles.

“We all get a bit lost in doing things the way we have always done them,” Kramer admits, so he helps his clients see their operation in a new light. “It takes stepping back and looking at each practice objectively, analyzing if what you are doing is actually working.” To increase ROI, Kramer suggests “getting lean.” The question he poses to his clients is, “What does this mean for the success of your operation? Using variable-rate scripts and reducing the number of passes over a field reduces costs and increases efficiency in production.”

In addition to getting lean, Kramer recommends “practices that harness the power of Mother Nature. Practices that improve soil health are always a win-win.” Kramer is a huge advocate of incorporating a variety of cover crops and diversifying crop rotations because both practices increase soil health. “Reducing or eliminating tillage while increasing species diversity in rotations leads to an increase in soil health and microbial populations.”

“Adam's passion is truly unique. He is in business because he loves it,” notes National Corn Growers Association President, Kevin Ross. “Cooperating with farmers, learning alongside them, advising his neighbors while getting his own hands dirty are all things that set him apart from others.” Kramer's advice and counsel lead to greater knowledge, continual encouragement, increased resilience of farms, and long-term

profitability for his clients, Ross says.

Kramer has a dedicated conference room and demo farm designed to offer educational opportunities to his clients. Field-testing his ideas shows clients what works and what doesn't. “Adding small grains and cover crops is not like planting a tree that gives shade to your grandkids. The multi-year approach and diverse cropping system is increasing yields. This system creates a fast and permanent change that is evident and self-perpetuating.”

Positive Chain Reaction

The marrying of sustainable practices with food production just makes good sense to Kramer. “Environmental stewardship isn't separate from farming. The land is our workspace. I understood at a young age that caring for the land results in tangible benefits to growers.” The land has incredible capacity if we practice good stewardship techniques. “When we work together with nature, we begin a positive chain reaction—the land we care for in turn cares for us.

“People are increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of agriculture, food origin and safety. Agriculture, as an industry, can demonstrate how to produce food economically and benefit the environment. No industry works on the land more than agriculture. With available tools and technology, we can document many of the good things we do—and use this data to lead the conversation about our work and the impacts of sustainable agriculture.”

Kramer's advice to other crop advisers is to grow their knowledge and skillset every day, embrace technology that will help their clients, and look for ways to be more efficient in their work and recommendations. The challenge for agriculture, Kramer believes, will continue to be finding ways to be profitable and embracing new

technology that brings innovations while also benefiting the environment.

Humbled by receiving the International CCA of the Year award, Kramer is very aware of every person who has helped him along his journey. “Countless people believed in me and shared their ideas and thoughts. Collaborating and trying things together leads to the largest impact—none of us can make it alone. I am grateful for each person that supported me and pushed me forward.”

Kramer never tires of working in the soil and watching things grow. “There is just something special about it. Farming has been the backbone of rural economies for a long time, and this way of life appeals to me. We are trying to work in a space that achieves the goals of environmental sustainability, sound production practices, and community development. There is a human element to agriculture that I've always been passionate about. Helping farmers make sound decisions that ultimately enable them to provide for their families, support their communities, and care for the land. Good stewardship and positive outcomes on the farm are why we do the work.”

Champions of agriculture, like ICCA of the Year Adam Kramer, push the bar forward, ensuring a bright future where food production and land stewardship occur in unison.

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