Science Societies

# Certified Crop Advisers advocate for ag research in Washington, DC

By Julie McClure

April 30, 2020



*Left: Pennsylvania CCA Eric Rosenbaum, CPSS Tracey Olexa, Rep. GT Thompson (PA), and Oklahoma State University student Ryan Bryant-Schlobohm. Middle: Tuskegee University student Adrianne Brown, North Carolina State University student Janel Ohletz, and Beth Guertal (past president of CSSA) and Audrey Gamble (CCA) of Auburn University. Right: Montana CCA Matthew Walker; ASA, CSSA, and SSSA staff member Katie Reiels; and South Dakota State University students Kyla Dendinger and Cole Berkley with Sen. John Thun*

The Congressional Visits Day (CVD) program is an annual event hosted by the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) that brings scientists, students, and CCAs together to advocate for agriculture research. Over the past several years, the participation of our CCAs has steadily increased, with 15 attending the 2020 CVD on March 2–3.

Before meeting with congressional offices, CVD participants received extensive communication and advocacy training. They learned that one of the most effective ways to influence the decisions of members of Congress is to talk about the local impacts of their research. The CCA participants were especially effective when discussing the local challenges growers face and how research can help address these issues.

“Research fuels good ag policy,” says Karl Wyant, Arizona CCA at Heliae Agriculture. “When the research capacity is diminished, or the pipeline has a bottleneck, the effects trickle across every aspect of the economy and even into your personal life. Research helps keep food secure, nutritious, and affordable.”

The message for CVD is the same each year: federally funded research generates agricultural knowledge and innovations that local producers can use to solve problems and improve efficiency. For the 2020 CVD, participants focused on three research programs within USDA: the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), a competitive equipment grants program, and a new research program called the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA), which would fund “breakthrough” research projects to address agriculture’s most pressing challenges.

## Direct Impacts on Agricultural Production



*Society members and CCAs in Washington, DC for the 2020 Congressional Visits Day.*

Certified Crop Advisers play a critical role in our advocacy strategy for CVD. The CCA participants connect theoretical research to practical field applications. While our CVD participants from university and industry can speak from an academic perspective, it is our CCAs who really bring home the message that this research is critical to growers. Sharing examples of local problems that growers face such as nutrient management, invasive species, and pest control, CCAs are able to illustrate how federally funded research directly impacts agricultural production.

This local perspective is incredibly valuable to members of Congress, especially those who represent agricultural sectors in their district or state. “As a Certified Crop Adviser, I and the growers I work with depend on the data from research to make profitable crops year in and year out,” says Jonathon Morris, a CCA at Tri County Farmers Association in Arkansas. “I was fortunate enough to meet directly with one of my Senators and remind him the importance of ag and the funding for research projects.”

Many CCA participants were pleased to discover that support for agriculture research is largely a bipartisan issue and could cut through the politics that seems to dominate DC. “During CVD, I was impressed that the congresspersons and their respective staffs were fully engaged in our meetings,” says Mike Blaine, a CCA with Beck’s Hybrids in Minnesota. “CVD was also a timely reminder that politics and government are not the

same."

Not only is CVD an opportunity for participants to engage in face-to-face advocacy with members of Congress, it's also an excellent networking opportunity that brings CCAs from across the country together. Many of the CCAs promoted their CVD participation through their personal and company social media accounts, and some even worked with their local newspapers to draw attention to the event. Check out the hashtag **#SupportAgResearch** on social media channels to see the CCAs in action.

Congressional Visits Day is a great experience that allows CCAs to come to Washington DC, meet their members of Congress, and discuss the work they do to help growers across the country. "I would recommend CVD to every CCA that can find the time to attend," Morris says. "Without ag research, our recommendations aren't as solid and [the CCA] voices from the front lines in the field are needed for that time with lawmakers."

Be sure to mark your calendars for next year's event: March 7–8, 2021.

## This Year's Participants

### CCAs

Mike Blaine, Beck's Hybrids

Sally Flis, The Fertilizer Institute

Audrey Gamble, Auburn University

David Green, ServiTech Inc

John Merkel, Ag Link Incorporated

Brad Mitchell, MidSouth Farmers Coop

Johnathon Morris, Tri County Farmers Association

Michael Plumblee, Clemson University

Eric Rosenbaum, Rosetree Consulting

Mike Saxton, Western Kentucky University

Darrell Scheresky, Dakota Agronomy Partners

Todd Steinacher, Agreliant Genetics

Matthew Walker, Simplot

Karl Wyant, Heliae Agriculture

**Greenfield Scholars**

Blair Bennis, Iowa State University

Cole Berkley, South Dakota State University

Lizbeth Cordova, Fresno State University

Kyla Dendinger, South Dakota State University

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