Science Societies

Strengthening the ASA–ICCA partnership to advance common interests

By Wade Thomason, ASA President

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> The American Society of Agronomy and the International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) Program are working toward strengthening the value, recognition, and impact of the CCA credential, which is a key objective of the new ICCA Strategic Plan. The organizations aim to expand professional development, connect research more directly to on-farm application, and better serve both advisers and farmers.

In my first message this year, I mentioned my desire to keep you updated on progress related to the ASA Strategic Plan and activities. As we move toward spring (at least in Oklahoma), I wanted to take the opportunity to focus on the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program and the developments that have taken place within the last year.

Three years ago, ASA went through a strategic-planning process, and we purposefully included representatives of the ICCA board's executive committee in that process. One of ASA's six objectives—sitting right at Number 2—is to extend our membership value proposition, "including to new audiences." One of the specific outcomes we will look to accomplish under this objective, over five years, is to introduce new programs and services that "deepen member and CCA engagement."

In 2024, we attempted to make good on that promise and we took a long, hard look at the concept of more formally developing a "membership" for CCAs. We were open-minded to the idea of it being a new or revised membership category under the ASA

umbrella or whether it was time for a "CCA association" or its equivalent. In July and August, we fielded a needs assessment of current CCAs, to determine whether there was a need or interest in membership under a number of different circumstances.

Deepening the value of earning and holding the CCA credential

We found that there was something resembling ambivalence to the general idea of "CCA membership," either as part of ASA or otherwise. However, we also found that there was significant interest in new and expanded programs and needs that better serve CCAs' needs: More educational opportunities, more networking opportunities, and a more sustained campaign to build wider awareness and appreciation of the CCA credential.

With that information in our pockets, in early 2025, the ICCA board commissioned a task force that took four to five months to go through a full strategic-planning process of its own. That group included members of the ICCA executive committee, significant representation from local CCA boards, and professional staff. And while the concept of CCA membership was regularly discussed, the clear message from all corners of our community is that, beyond membership, ASA and the ICCA board must devote much more attention to deepening the value of earning and holding the CCA credential.

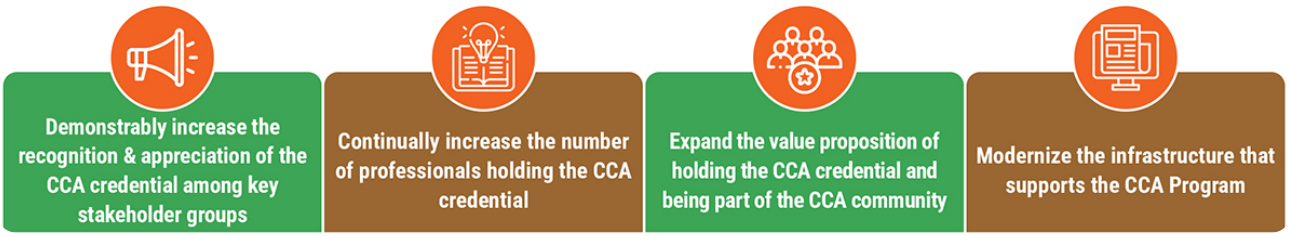
Here are the four objectives of the new ICCA Strategic Plan:

1. Demonstrably increase the recognition and appreciation of the CCA credential among key stakeholder groups.

2. Continually increase the number of professionals holding the CCA credential.

3. Expand the value proposition of holding the CCA credential and being part of the CCA community.

4. Modernize the infrastructure that supports the CCA Program.



Connecting research with its application

You don't see "membership" specifically represented within those objectives, but I think you can see the spirit of membership throughout. Importantly, we know that the traditional set of benefits that fall under ASA membership did not develop over time to serve the needs of most CCAs, who work more directly with farmers and who likely wouldn't be interested in attending CANVAS nor in publishing research in our scientific journals. So, it makes little sense to draw a circle around our CCAs and call them ASA members.

That said, we can and must do much more both to accentuate the value of holding the CCA credential and in finding more and better ways to connect the research of ASA members with its application on farms through our network of CCAs. We live and operate in the same ecosystem and getting reality checks from farmers, through our network of CCAs, of what agronomic science is working and what is not remains the ultimate value of the extended partnership that exists between the American Society of Agronomy and the CCA Program.

So, while the CCA Program now has its own strategic plan—and it should—it is incumbent upon both ASA's leadership and the CCA Program's leadership to find more ways to leverage our collective assets to advance our common interests.

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