Science Societies

Meet the new vice-chair of the North American CCA Board

By Denice Rackley

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Traci Bultemeier with her family on their farm, Wayne Trace Farms, near Fort Wayne, IN. Pictured are Traci, her husband Jamie, and their boys Wyatt (now 13) and Luke (8).

Be Brave. Continually step outside your comfort zone," is the advice from the newly elected vice-chair for the North American CCA board, Traci Bultemeier, CCA and CPAg. "We give up so much when we stay comfortable."

Bultemeier gives this advice because it has worked for her. "There are unfathomable opportunities in agronomy and the entire field of agriculture that are waiting for you."

Experiences Lead to Career Path

Growing up on a small eastern Ohio livestock and grain farm, Bultemeier's family had a farrow to finish hog and cow-calf operation with just enough row crops to support the livestock. Bultemeier laughs as she thinks back to her childhood. "Probably the reason I veered toward agronomy rather than livestock is I was tired of shoveling manure."

Bultemeier's involvement in her local Future Farmers of America (FFA) fanned the agronomy spark planted while gardening alongside her mom. It provided the opportunity for that first step into the unknown, outside the confines of her home town.

"FFA opened up a big wide world that I had not experienced before. Contests provided opportunities to travel, meet industry professionals, and experience the world."



Traci Bultemeier (right), CCA and CPAg, is the newly elected vice-chair for the North American CCA board.

Excited to continue expanding her knowledge of agronomy, Bultemeier attended Ohio State, receiving both a bachelor's and master's degree in Agronomy. During college, weed science and the chemical side of agronomy captivated her imagination. "There are thousands of species that are detrimental to crops, some of which are the oldest species on the planet—to me, that's extraordinary. Being able to identify these plant species and working to control them is fascinating."

Working in the weed science department during college enabled Bultemeier to form relationships on a professional level. "My professors encouraged me to attend [American Society of Agronomy] and weed science meetings. They went out of their way to introduce their students and research assistants to other professionals."

Working on research projects, attending professional meetings, and networking at these meetings opened doors. "My professors brought the CCA program to my attention, encouraging me to take the test. I passed the test but needed to wait to become certified until I had field experience."

Bultemeier's time as a DuPont research station intern cemented her fascination with weed science and chemical controls. "Transitioning from greenhouse research to field trials where we documented plants' reactions to new compounds revealed the results of our painstaking work." Witnessing the practical endpoint positively impacting someone's operation fuels Bultemeier's passion for agronomy. "It's exciting to work with ideas from concept to finish."

Working as a CCA

For the last 18 years, Bultemeier has worked for Pioneer, as a field sales agronomist then as an account manager in Ohio and then in northeast Indiana as a territory manager for Corteva Pioneer. In her current role, she is responsible for managing 25 independent sales agencies and associate sellers in not only the day-to-day business, but in long-term planning for business success.

She gratefully takes every opportunity to get her hands dirty on in-field service calls and to be face to face with farmers. Utilizing the continuing education provided through the CCA program, she enjoys suggesting possible new avenues that could expand clients' profitable farming margins.

Serving as a board chair for both the Ohio and Indiana CCA boards has provided Bultemeier with experiences that are useful in helping other CCAs adapt to the changing ag environment and meet the needs of members in the face of a challenging pandemic that has altered everyone's reality. "We need to keep growers profitable, educated, and engaged, assisting them in making the necessary adaptations to their practices for a sustainable future."

The challenges before CCAs, Bultemeier believes, is to advise farmers on approaches to become more productive and promote conservation without losing yield or profit.

"How do CCAs work with local, state, federal governments, and environmental groups to assist farmers in becoming more productive and create sustainable food systems that conserves resources without reinventing the wheel for each farmer?

"We need to make a concerted effort to work together to present a cohesive message to farmers."

In addition to bringing a uniform message to farmers, there is a continual challenge to promote the CCA program's vast advantages to agriculture employers and garner interest among youth to pursue an agriculture career.

"We need to reach out to employers and farmers, helping them understand what CCAs bring to their businesses. Together we can instill excitement about the future of agriculture into the next generation of producers and agronomy professionals who will take our place."

Goals for CCA Program

Bultemeier's goals for the CCA program revolve around outreach and continually strengthening the program. She feels the educational programs offered to CCAs sets this program and its certificants apart. "The voluntary nature of the program ensures our members are motivated to serve their employers and farmers. CCAs volunteer to be held to a high standard. They build a wealth of knowledge to give the best advice possible and positively impact operations."

Bultemeier points out that for operations to be successful, farmers need specific information in a wide variety of specialty areas. Only those with an overall understanding of production can provide the assistance required. "No one has all the information needed, but the wide scope of CCA program encourages networking opportunities, enabling us to reach out and find the needed experts."

No one could have predicted the importance of embracing technology and offering virtual learning opportunities. "The CCA program has done a wonderful job with the virtual classroom, growing the interest and participation in these programs will no doubt continue even after the pandemic," Bultemeier notes. But technology can only go so far.

At every level, agriculture is about building and maintaining relationships, Bultemeier believes; technology can't replace face-to-face interaction.

Instilling Enthusiasm in Youth

Reaching out to high school and college students is a priority for her. "We must inspire enthusiasm for agriculture careers and keep an influx of new ideas flowing into the program.

"I want to see the same level of anticipation and excitement for agriculture that my husband and I had when we were in high school and college and still have today."

The Bultemeiers reach out to community youth through 4H and FFA while continuing farming traditions at home. Blending modern technology with a conservation mindset while embracing sustainability, the Wayne Trace Farm near Fort Wayne, IN is a family affair. Bultemeier might have gravitated to crops for a career to escape manure, but she is circling back to livestock production with their boys. The concept to finish theme that runs throughout Bultemeier's life is evident here. "We have a diverse farm and raise chickens, several breeds of sheep, and crops. Our boys are actively involved in our farm; they have their own flock Shetland sheep to raise for wool and meat."

Instilling enthusiasm in the next generation of agricultural professionals is a mission that Traci Bultemeier shares with her husband Jamie, an agronomist with A&L Great Lakes, who is also a CCA and CPAg. Jamie serves as the superintendent for the National FFA Agronomy Career Development Event (CDE). In conjunction with FFA, the Crop Science Society of America and American Society of Agronomy are developing the National FFA Agronomy CDE exam and are looking toward developing educational courses for students interested in pursuing crop advisory positions or other agronomic avenues. While in the early stages, the goal of the partnership is to

encourage students to experience potential career paths within the agronomy industry while working to master fundamental skills required of professional agronomists.

Bultemeier is looking forward to sharing her excitement for agronomy as she serves her fellow CCAs as vice-chair. She believes CCAs are called to be trusted advisers, using their knowledge and experience to guide farmers toward land stewardship while assisting them with choices that optimize income on every acre. She feels honored to assist CCAs in successfully completing this mission.

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