Science Societies

Certified professionals join students, researchers to advocate for ag research funding

By Rachel K. Owen

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Members from Georgia and ICCA chair-elect, Isaac Wolford, meet with House Agriculture Committee staff during this year's virtual Congressional Visits Day in March.

In early March, students, researchers, and certified professionals from the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) came together to advocate for increased funding for essential agricultural research during virtual Congressional Visits Day (CVD). More than 90 participants, including 33 certified professionals, led over 100 meetings with congressional offices from 30 different states. In the meetings, participants requested increased support for three USDA competitive grants programs—the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA), and the Equipment Grants Program.

Participants of CVD received plentiful support for agriculture research from members of Congress and their staff. The advocacy efforts during CVD help them understand the value of investing in agriculture research programs at USDA and provide elected officials with information to share with their colleagues. Certified professionals add a unique perspective to the congressional meetings—they showcase how research directly impacts agricultural producers across the country.

During a meeting with the office of Sen. Hyde-Smith (MS), Mississippi CCAs Andrew Wicker and Bruce West talked about how agronomic research is crucial for identifying new chemistries to fight herbicide resistance in the South. Nancy Bohl Bormann, a CCA based in northwestern Iowa, spoke with elected officials about her Ph.D. research funded by an AFRI grant. In meetings with Arizona's elected officials, CCAs Lindsay Vicars, Edgard Jauregui, and Karl Wyant discussed how they use science-based solutions to promote sustainable agriculture practices. These are just a few examples of the important work CCAs communicated with lawmakers about during the event.

Rapid Response to Pressing Agricultural Issues

This year, CCAs had a unique opportunity to provide input on measures that can help provide relief to the global food supply given the crisis in Ukraine. During CVD, Sen. Boozman (AR) sent a letter to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack requesting flexibility for enrollment and practices in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for the 2022 growing season to counter market disruptions in global crop markets caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Comments were later submitted to the Senate Agriculture Committee discussing the implications of releasing CRP acres back to cropland. Certified Crop Advisers provided critical feedback about the agronomic considerations of such a decision. The full comments can be accessed here: **https://bit.ly/3x7ldiz**.

USDA Funding Updates

During CVD, the fiscal year 2022 (FY22) spending bill was passed with increased support for agronomy, crop science, and soil science research. The full list of FY22 appropriations can be found here: **https://bit.ly/36Bway4**. Some highlights include:

- $1 million for AgARDA to hire staff and create a strategic plan
- $445 million for AFRI (up $10 million from FY21)
- $1.7 billion for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS; up $230 million from FY21)

Future Engagement Opportunities for Certified Professionals

In 2021, the ICCA Executive Committee established an ICCA Policy Committee. The committee will be tracking issues in Washington, DC and beyond that impact certified professionals. One of the most important upcoming efforts will be presenting the priorities of our members and professionals for the 2023 farm bill reauthorization process. Please watch for emails and opportunities from the Science Policy Office—your input is critical as we work with lawmakers to advocate for science-

based agricultural solutions. Finally, we hope to see you at CVD in 2023!

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