Specialty Certification – Cover Crops

1. General Description. Describe the need for a Specialty Area, and a general description of the overall work or services to be performed by the Specialty Area-certified CCA for an individual grower/farmer. Specific description is preferred, including all expected deliverables produced by the proposed specialty-certified CCA.

Certified crop advisers are uniquely positioned to produce expert agronomic advice to not only improve farmer’s profitability but also reduce their impact on the environment. Cover crops are a renewed practice among farmers. In the Corn Belt cover crops are seen as a way for farmers to not only reduce soil erosion and loss of nitrogen and phosphorus but also have the potential to increase and stabilize cash crop yields but lack of expert technical advice exists. Providing CCAs the opportunity to learn more about cover crops and receive a specialty certification can increase their business and provide farmers with the confidence that they are working with a CCA who is trained in cover crops. Deliverables expected include: an increase in the number of CCAs certified in basic and advanced cover cropping for Corn Belt farming systems; improved technical advice to farmers looking to add cover crops; reduction in cover cropping failures among the farming population; and an increase in the committed use to cover crops throughout the Corn Belt.

2. Funding.

A. Program Development. Is funding provided from the requester for development of this specialty area certification? Describe the funding process and any delivery of funds to ICCA.

Practical Farmers of Iowa along with our partners and the Midwest Cover Crops Council researcher members would secure funding to develop this Specialty Area. We would ask the ASA be a strong partner in requesting funds from funders we are sure would support the development of this program. These funders have already been generous supporters of cover crops outreach across the Corn Belt.

B. Work by a specialty-certified CCA. Describe the source and form of compensation to an individual CCA for the work to be performed. Not applicable at this time.

3. Target audience to receive services by SpecialtyArea-certified CCA. Describe geographic region, estimate number of farms, type of farm(s), acreage, crops. Identify provider(s) that currently deliver needed services (in item #1) to the target audience.

The target audience would be centered within the Corn Belt and more specifically best start in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois. The systems which would be most impacted would be corn and soybean acres but also include corn silage, small grain production, seed corn and soybeans, and potentially sweet corn production. Livestock producers’ systems would also benefit. The number of farms could potentially be 100,000 with acreages ranging from 500 to 25,000. Currently the NRCS and some extension programs along with non-profit farmer organizations like Practical Farmers of Iowa and researcher members of the Midwest Cover Crops Council are providing cover crop extension and outreach. They are also providing some training to CCAs through a webinar series with ASA.
and presentations at individual annual conferences. But no formalized curriculum even within the Depts. of Agronomy at the Land Grant Institutions in these states exists that focuses on cover crops.

4. **Capabilities.** Describe why current ICCA performance objectives are not sufficient to meet the needs of the proposed Specialty Area Certification. Is any specialized training course or materials suggested or required? Are new proficiency statements available or being developed? Describe the maintenance of capabilities. Does the requester expect periodic subject matter updating to proficiencies? If yes, is the requester capable and willing to assume responsibility for the updating, with approval by and coordination from ICCA Board? Is the CCA CEU process, to document educational fulfillment in a specific subject matter area, satisfactory to accomplish specialty capabilities updates? For future program continuity and coordination, a periodic review process is proposed, to review specialty area performance objectives (every 4 years), to consider inclusion of those objectives into the core ICCA performance objectives.

CCAs can receive soil and water credits by attending webinars or workshops that are about cover crops but no formal curriculum exists. A committee of cover crop researchers will create the training course materials. Those researchers will then be available for annual updates of information to the course or within the desired time period set by ASA. I believe the CCA CEU process for educational fulfillment is satisfactory. After taking a set of courses, the CCAs would complete an exam to become specialty certified. Continuing education courses would also be developed to renew their specialty certification.

5. **Proof of Specialty Competency.** In addition to training (CEUs) is proof of specialty capability required by the requester? Various options - completion of a special project, interview, case study report, exam, some combination of these, etc. Explain the process, identifying who develops and evaluates the "proof". If an exam is requested, is participation by ICCA in exam development needed or requested? If yes, provide details of exam development, administration and maintenance.

An exam would be appropriate as proof or a written set of recommendations based on a set of case studies from real farmer scenarios.

6. **Timeframe.** What is the general timeframe during which this specialty area needs to be made available (country, region, state, watershed, province)? Detail any requester deadlines. Identify geographic priorities, if any. Applicants are encouraged to inform ICCA headquarters at least six months in advance of any deadlines.

At this point I think the sooner we start the development process the better. The cover crop researchers have an annual working meeting, which will take place February 2015 in Iowa. That would be an opportunity to have them work on refining the curriculum and exam criteria for the Specialty Certificate.

7. **Assistance.** Does the applicant need or require assistance from the ICCA program to develop or maintain certain aspects of this program? Describe where assistance is desired and expectations for cooperation both initially and into the future. ICCA will maintain a current roster of specialty certified CCAs.
The exam would be administered by the ICCA Program using their exam procedures. Reporting and tracking of CEUs and renewal of the certification would be through the ICCA Program.