

# ICCA – Sustainability Specialty Certification Project Description

Sustainability and using sustainable practices is a growing concern for food companies and retailers. The public is demanding that the products they purchase are using proven sustainable practices.

This project directly ties to the ICCA Strategic Plan under the following:

**GOAL 1:** Increase the value of CCA Certification.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Increase value of ICCA program to stakeholders.
  - Establish relationships with food industry. (Field through Fork).
    - Seek recognition of the CCA role, in writing from at least 10 major food chain suppliers in their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and/or sustainability programs.
  - Expand relationships with Agri-business Industry.
    - Seek recognition of the CCA role by 10 new major Agri-business employers (including Manufacturers and Retailers) incorporating written statements about employing CCAs.

The United Soybean Board (USB) is partnering with ASA/ICCA to develop educational modules for sustainable practices and a specialty certification for CCAs who desire to add this credential. The USB will be providing \$93,748 in financial support to develop the project in 2015.

**Project Description:**

There is a lot of interest in the food industry to track and report the practices that are incorporated into crop production. Farmers need to use best management practices while protecting the environment, producing safe food and without over-exploiting our planet's natural resources all while earning a profit. Farmers consider themselves good stewards of the land and environment but perhaps they can do better. With the food industry going to demand sustainable production and record-keeping, they will need to demonstrate that their crop production practices are sustainable or learn what best practices to adopt to become more sustainable. Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), who are trained agronomists, are key influencers on farmer decisions and by improving their knowledge of sustainability and best management practices, they can influence their customers and clientele to become more sustainable.

The purpose of the project is to utilize CCAs to help influence farmers to become better stewards and adopt the best management practices that make them sustainable and meet the requirements of the food industry and the demands of the general public for safe food while protecting the environment and preserving our natural resources. The project is designed to bring together some of the best minds from the public and private sectors to define what sustainable crop production is, what CCAs are expected to do and develop a training program for CCAs to become certified in sustainability. CCAs, once initially certified by the American Society of Agronomy, already have considerable knowledge on conventional production practices. However, providing advice on sustainable approaches to crop production is not something they have been required to do as part of their profession.

For farmers to adopt the Best Management Practices and strive to become a more sustainable crop producer there needs to be criteria they can evaluate themselves against to see where

they are at and where they need to go. However any change in practices comes with cost and time. CCA's have a great opportunity to influence farmers, but any change that improves sustainability must also address the question of "what's in it for me" and make economic sense by either reducing costs, increasing income or yield or opening up new markets. Training will touch on the economic benefits from adopting Best Management Practices.

This project will create a curriculum above and beyond the standard certification qualifications of CCAs, develop a training program that will elevate their knowledge and skills to be better advocates for sustainable crop production and enable them to provide a new level of advice to their clientele. The CCA will receive a specialty certification in sustainability by meeting the requirements that will need to be renewed annually.

To complete the project, the team would assemble an advisory panel of individuals including a farmer, practicing CCA, university agronomist, industry agronomist, food industry representative and an association representative that represents the food industry. The advisory panel will provide oversight and direction to the project during development. To make sure the education program proposed touches on the right topics, an electronic survey will be conducted among agronomy professionals who are CCAs or members of the agronomy societies to develop a complete set of best management practices. A roundtable will then be organized bringing together the advisory panel with another 8 to 10 experts from the public and private sector to define sustainable crop production, develop performance and learning objectives, write a curriculum for six modules and suggest experts who should develop the modules. An application for a Specialty Certification in Sustainability will be made to the International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) board. Subject matter experts will develop six modules for online delivery with supporting collateral materials and an exam. The six modules will be launched live, online in the third quarter of 2015 and CCAs will be recruited to participate. CCAs will complete a module by passing an exam before moving on to the next module. Upon successful completion of the six modules they will be granted the specialty certification. The modules will also be archived and available online for CCAs to take at their leisure. The American Society of Agronomy will promote this "Sustainability Specialist" training program to its CCA membership.

CCAs are the single best influencers to work with local producers and help them adopt more sustainable crop production practices that will satisfy the future demands of the food industry and consumer.

#### **Project Summary:**

- The goal is to improve CCAs' (Certified Crop Adviser) knowledge of sustainability and best management practices and harness them to improve the sustainability of U.S. crop farmers, focusing on using best management practices for corn, soybeans and wheat.
- The objective is to develop a training program certifying CCAs with a Sustainability Specialist credential. The training program will certify that the CCA has the knowledge and skills on Best Management Practices to lead to more sustainable crop production. The training program will be delivered through the American Society of Agronomy's CCA portal.
- The target audience includes the 13,000 CCAs that are currently active and registered. To participate and become certified, participants have to have a current active CCA registration. However other professionals and farmers can participate but will not receive a certification.

- The project involves organizing an advisory panel of six individuals from the public and private sector to guide the design and development of the program.
- Programming will be delivered via the web including six online courses, accompanied by written materials and an exam to measure comprehension.
  - The first phase of the project will organize and schedule a meeting of advisory panel and conduct an electronic survey to develop a list of BMPs (Best Management Practices) for sustainable crop production. Both practicing CCAs and professionals that are members of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of American will be surveyed electronically. This phase will take 2 to 3 months.
  - The second phase of the project will involve bringing together 15 experts into a 2-day meeting to discuss the initiative, write performance objectives and learning objectives and then outline the curriculum that will be covered in six modules and identify the experts who will develop the modules. This phase will take up to 5 months.
  - An application will be submitted to the International CCA board for approval of a Certification in Sustainability. This phase will take 3 months.
  - The third phase of the project will be contracting with experts to develop the modules, collateral learning material, and an exam. This phase will take 3 to 4 months.
  - The fourth phase of the project is initial delivery of the six modules to CCAs. This phase will take 3 to 4 months.
- CCAs will earn 6 CEUs (Continuing Education Units) by completing the six online modules. However, participants will have to pass the first module before advancing on to the second module and so on until they successfully complete the six modules.
- Registrants will be required to pay \$25 per CEU offered. One hour of education is equal to one CEU.
- Once certified CCAs will have to earn 5 CEUs every two years and pay a projected annual renewal fee of \$50 to remain certified.
- Project is 17 months in length with design and development taking 12 months from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. The initial online delivery of the six modules will take place between November 1, 2015 and February 29, 2016 with all materials being archived on line by February 29, 2016.
- The training program will be publically launched at a media event at the American Society of Agronomy's annual meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota on November 15 to 18, 2015.
- After initial delivery, materials will be archived and posted online and CCAs can continue to take the online course, exam and become certified in sustainability at their leisure.
- ASA anticipates certifying 1000 CCAs in the first two years of the program.
- After completion of the project, the online course will be self-sustaining based on collecting registration fees of \$25 per CEU from CCAs who choose to be certified. The American Society of Agronomy will take ownership and the responsibility of administering the training program after the project is complete.

**Target Audience(s):**

- Primary - crop consultants and agronomists who are currently Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs).

- Secondary - other professionals interested in sustainable production practices and need the knowledge and skill sets in the food industry.

**Activities:**

The objective is to develop a training program certifying CCAs with a Sustainability Specialist credential. The training program will certify that the CCA has the knowledge and skills on Best Management Practices to lead to more sustainable crop production. The main activities to complete during the course of the year include:

- Establish an advisory panel of 6 individuals from industry and universities to provide direction and oversight. This group would meet initially at the American Society of Agronomy's annual meeting in Long Beach, California in November, 2014.
- Develop an educational program in sustainability that will require identifying the best management practices that make producers sustainable and identify the requirements of a sustainable farmer. A survey tool will be written and delivered electronically to active CCAs and professionals who are members of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of America. The survey tool will focus on crop production and those practices that CCAs can influence farmers to adopt which are within the scope of their professional skill sets. This list will be used as a checklist when developing the content for the educational modules. This survey would be conducted during the last two months of 2014.
- The project will bring together 15 experts with different backgrounds from the public and private sectors (including the food industry) to discuss the goal of the program and write an education plan including performance and learning objectives, draft a curriculum and suggest experts who could develop the content based on the curriculum (tentative agenda and example list of module topics follow). The outcome is a thorough educational plan that will ensure that CCAs are knowledgeable in sustainability and sustainable crop production. This roundtable will be held during January, 2015.
- The educational plan will be circulated to the advisory panel and select group of CCAs and professionals for review and comments during the first quarter of 2015.
- The team will submit the education plan (performance and learning objectives and curriculum) for Specialty Certification in Sustainability to the International CCA board for approval. This will be done during the third quarter of 2015.
- Based on the detailed curriculum provided in the educational plan, content experts will develop six training modules, supporting documentation and exam questions. This will be done during the second and third quarters of 2015.
- Website will be developed during the third quarter of 2015.
- CCA-Sustainability Specialist will be launched at the American Society of Agronomy annual meetings in Minneapolis, Minnesota in November, 2015.
- Launch online training program where first delivery will be live and recorded for later use as self-paced study. This will be done during the fourth quarter of 2015.
- Materials will be archived online for continual access by CCAs.

**Project Timeline:**

| <b>Date</b>                     | <b>Description</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| October 1, 2014                 | Start Date   |
| October, 2014                   | Identify individuals who can be on the advisory panel and their role   |
| October, 2014                   | Write electronic survey tool to identify BMPs  |
| November, 2014                  | Present "Sustainability Specialist" concept to advisory panel, experts and potential content providers at American Society of Agronomy annual meeting in Long Beach, California                          |
| November-December, 2014         | Conduct BMP survey with CCAs and professionals who are members of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of America.                                 |
| January, 2015                   | Organize roundtable with experts to write educational plan including performance objectives, learning objectives and curriculum for six modules and identifying individuals who can prepare each module. |
| February-May, 2015              | Learning plan is reviewed by advisory panel, industry and CCAs   |
| May, 2015                       | Decide on appropriate method/format for developing online modules that align with the curriculum and procedure for developing them   |
| June-September, 2015            | Learning plan is submitted to the ICCA for approval of "CCA – Sustainability Specialist"   |
| June-September 2015             | Develop six modules including PowerPoint, collateral material and exam questions   |
| September-October, 2015         | Recruit CCAs to participate in the initial offering "CCA-Sustainability Specialist" education program  |
| September-October, 2015         | Review modules, complete website interface and post learning materials   |
| November, 2015                  | Training program will be launched at a media event at the American Society of Agronomy's annual meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota  |
| November, 2015 - February, 2016 | Deliver modules and exams online to CCAs via live streaming  |
| February, 2016                  | Archive modules, collateral material and exams for later access by CCAs  |
| February 1, 2016 and beyond     | Materials and continued delivery of the education program become the responsibility of the American Society of Agronomy.   |

**Expected Outputs/Deliverables:**

- Completion of survey of BMPs (Best Management Practices).

- Approval of Performance and Learning Objectives and Certification by ICCA.
- Completion of six approved topics and learning modules.
- Launching of “CCA-Sustainability Specialist” Certification.
- Completion of six webinars presentations covering the six topics with at least six CEUs (continuing education units).
- Initial first live delivery of the six modules and having them recorded.
- Training of 500 CCAs in the 1<sup>st</sup> year and an additional 500 more CCAs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

**Key Performance Indicators:**

Target values for measuring success with project implementation (output):

- Number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) being offered – 6 to 9 CEUs (1.0 to 1.5 CEUs per module).
- Number of crop consultants/agronomists participating in the webinar series – 1000 annually.
- Number of crop consultants/agronomists becoming certified – 800 annually (80% of participants complete the certification).
- Number of crop consultants/agronomists choosing to stay certified after the first two years – 600 annually (75% of the 800 who attain certification).
- Number of requests to participate in the course by professionals other than a CCA – 100 requests annually.
- Number of endorsements of the curriculum by conservation groups, food companies and other third party entities – 10 during the first two years.

Target values for measuring behavior change enabled by successful project implementation (outcome); to be measured through a statistically valid, independent survey of project stakeholders:

- Number of crop consultants/agronomists who become stewards of sustainability – 1000 annually.
- Number of crop consultants/agronomists consulting with their farmer customers and advising on sustainability – 25 farmer clients with another 50 to 75 customers/prospects for each CCA on average.
- Number of farmers who adopt better best management practices leading to increased sustainability - 5000 (10 for each CCA certified).
- Number of food companies that come to rely on crop consultants/agronomists to communicate their demand for more sustainable food production to farmers – 10 during the first two years.