Study Objective

This study included both qualitative input (focus groups) and quantitative input (online surveying) with Certified Crop Advisors (CCA) and Certified Professional Soil Scientists (CPSS).

The research was designed to gain feedback regarding the certification programs, their benefits and value to assist the client in further program development and to increase participation.

For the quantitative input, utilizing the available certification email lists, Avant Marketing invited advisors and scientists to participate in the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certified Audience</th>
<th>Total Invites</th>
<th>Total Completes</th>
<th>Percentage Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>10,623</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPPS</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
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Participation By State

Iowa, Illinois and California were the leading states in survey participation.

What is the primary state in which you practice?
Over half of respondents are ag retailer advisors.

Which best describes your position?

- Company/Ag Retailer Advisor: 56%
- Independent Advisor: 25%
- Retired: 5%
- Other: 10%

“Other” Category Includes: Government Agencies, Manufacturers, Farm Managers, Growers.
Sixty-six percent of participants are over the age of 45.
Value of Certification

Half of participants believe that the value of certification has remained the same over the past 10 years.
Participants who believe value of certification has remained the same

A large percentage state that there is no or low value to certification and that has not changed in the past 10 years.

Participants who believe value of certification has increased

Increase value perception is based on California requirements for irrigation and nutrient planning as well as the adaption of technology and new farming methods that raises the importance of professional agronomists and endorsed by ag retailers.

Participants who believe value of certification has decreased

Many state that certification does not have value and continues to decrease since most ag retailers do not require certification as a crop consultant.
Please rate the importance of each of the following strategies that could benefit the Certification Program on a 1 to 10 scale.

Promoting awareness and importance of certification with growers and producers is rated highest in importance.
Precision Agriculture Training is rated as having the highest value added to the certification program.

- Offer Group Liability Insurance for CCAs: 2.14
- Annual Recognition of Top-Performing CCAs: 1.93
- Evaluation & Ratings of Precision Ag Suppliers: 2.13
- Marketing & Outreach Training: 2.08
- Business Management Training: 2.23
- Precision Agriculture Training: 2.46

Please rate the following on the value it would add to the certification program (No Value/Moderate Value/High Value).
The ICCA Program and Certification will only grow if mandated by regulation.
The CCA has a key role in taking technology from Precision to Decision Agriculture.
Younger generation farmers value crop advisors less than previous generations.

How much do you agree with the following statements?
Larger farm operations rely more on the crop advisor to translate data into decisions.
Certification assists entry-level students in their job search.

How much do you agree with the following statements?

- Totally Disagree: 7%
- Somewhat Disagree: 18%
- Somewhat Agree: 55%
- Totally Agree: 20%
The demand for independent crop advisors/agronomists is growing.
Most farmers have little awareness and see little value in Certification.
CCAs should become the experts in agriculture carbon credit processing.
CCAs should become the official professional in certifying sustainable crops and grains.

How much do you agree with the following statements?
Level of Improvement Needed

Certification Application

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?
Level of Improvement Needed

Certification Exam and Process

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?
Level of Improvement Needed

Ongoing Education Requirements

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?

- No Improvement Needed: 40%
- Some Improvement Needed: 49%
- A Lot of Improvement Needed: 12%
For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?

**Recording CEUs**

- No Improvement Needed: 56%
- Some Improvement Needed: 38%
- A Lot of Improvement Needed: 6%
Level of Improvement Needed

Available Webinars and Online Classrooms

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?
For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?

CCA Merchandising and Promotional Support

- No Improvement Needed: 41%
- Some Improvement Needed: 42%
- A Lot of Improvement Needed: 17%
Level of Improvement Needed

Networking Access with Other CCAs

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?

- No Improvement Needed: 29%
- Some Improvement Needed: 56%
- A Lot of Improvement Needed: 15%
Level of Improvement Needed

The website: www.certifiedcropadvisor.org

For the following, what is the level of improvement needed?
Participants provided a variety of suggestions regarding increasing the value or the number of CCAs in the future. Key suggestions included:

- Increase awareness/market to growers the importance of certification
- Emphasize real world examples that CCAs can assist in tackling
- Promote at the college and university level
- Promote state requirements
- Provide more information on the economics of agronomic decisions
- Marketing focused towards employers
- CCAs should certify carbon credits
- Continue education gaps in farming knowledge
- Sub-categories or more area of specialization may be beneficial
- Keep standards high
- CCA Apprentice Program for college students
Program Recommendations

Participants provided in-depth input to improvements to both certification programs. It is recommended that the actual open-ended responses be reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the input.

While no component of certification or the certification process was rated as needing significant improvement, participants of both programs see the need to increase the value of certification through education and awareness.

Based on this input, we offer the following recommendations for outreach strategies.
Program Recommendations

Certified Crop Advisor Program

While there is potential that additional states may follow the current regulations in California for licensing, there is strong interest from participants to increase the awareness of the value of certification, particularly noting technology applications and new farming methods. Where regulations do not mandate licensing, the ag retailer is seen as a vital collaborator in expanding the value of certification.

Key Messaging

A Certified Crop Advisor maintains a high level of knowledge (through required continued education) and expertise for today’s modern farming methods. A Certified Crop Advisor can provide the best options for farm return-on-investment utilizing technology, data and his or her expertise. Having this highly qualified expertise translates precision agriculture into decision agriculture.

Communications Strategies

1. Develop a strong earned media communications plan focused on production agriculture. The plan should include key agriculture farm and channel publications/websites, farm radio and television, and social media.

2. Develop a speaker’s bureau of qualified Certified Crop Advisors that can be accessed for interviews and feature articles. Emphasis should be placed on current agriculture trends including precision agriculture, new farming methods and sustainability issues.

Ag Retailer Certification

To assist in promoting the value and expertise of certification, an Ag Retailer Certification Program should be developed. To gain certification, an Ag Retailer or Cooperative must mandate certification of all crop advisors in their employment. For new employees, a certification path over a 3-year period must be evident. All costs of certification must be borne by the Ag Retailer or Cooperative.