

California Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program

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Introduction

The CCA program is an outreach program. Nationally over 12,000 Crop Advisers are certified under its authority. In California there are over 400 individuals currently certified under the CCA program. The success of this program will be judged in two ways. First, the consistent increase in the number of participating CCA's in California. Second the retention of CA CCA's will be a criterion for gauging the success of this project. Net growth (through retention and new certification) will help the CA CCA program move towards a self-sufficient program.

Objectives

The overall objective of this project is to support the broader mission of the California Certified Crop Adviser program by:

1. Administering the California CCA program through managing the testing and certification of new members, tracking individual continuing education units, marketing the program, and updating the web site.
2. Coordinating the CCA activities within the policies and goals of the International CCA as well as the State CCA Board.
3. Developing and implementing a strategic and tactical plan for a self-funded CCA program.

Project Description

The Certified Crop Adviser Program was introduced in California in 1992 in an effort to address increased concerns regarding agriculture's contributions to a variety of environmental problems including non-point source pollution. By mid 1994 the California Certified Crop Adviser program was established with support from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the American Society of Agronomy and the California agricultural industry. The program was intended to raise the awareness and professional standards of individuals making recommendations for the use of agricultural fertilizers, pesticides and related products. The CA CCA program currently provides the highest standards for certification that are available in California and includes rigorous testing and education requirements. The initial certification of an individual requires a minimum level of education combined with experience in a relevant agricultural discipline as well as passing both State and International exams. The exams cover four competency areas including 1) nutrient management; 2) soil and water management; 3) crop management and 4) integrated pest management. Maintaining certification requires that participating individuals accumulate a minimum of 40 hours of continuing education every two years covering each of the competency areas.

Since the implementation of the CCA program in California, over 500 individuals have obtained certification. These individuals have now been involved in the program for several years and form the core membership on which to build a broader program. In the last several years, the CCA program in California has focused on developing a management system that provides for testing, continuing education and tracking of individual crop advisers certifications (CEU's accumulated, tests, status etc). Additionally, in the last year the CA CCA office has focused on service to its member base by providing advance course certification, regular newsletters and quick professional response to member inquiries and concerns. This solid management provides the basis for the expansion of the program and the strategic movement towards a self-run program.

In that regard, the Western Growers Association through a FREP grant has provided administration and oversight for the program. The daily and routine activities associated with program management include preparing and submitting CDFR, ICCA and CA CCA Board reports, coordinating the activities and efforts of all cooperator groups in relation to the CCA program, providing communication

between the state and national boards, providing program information to participants and the State CCA Board and maintaining CEU tracking systems and the CA CCA Web Site. In addition, the Board directs the staff in marketing efforts, strategic planning and other projects at their discretion.

The Chairman of the California State Board represents the states interests on the International CCA Board and serves on the National Policy Council. The State Board is responsible for maintaining credibility through the implementation of sound policy and oversight of program activities. The American Society of Agronomy, in coordination and cooperation with the California Certified Crop Adviser Program, administers the certification of CCA's under prescribed international standards.

In support of the local CA CCA Program, WGA and the CA CCA are working to support a national marketing effort for the certified crop adviser program. This program is designed to help re-enforce the value of the CCA program across the country and to generate enthusiasm for the field. It will include national efforts as well as the development of "state modules" that can be used to market the program in state.

Results and Conclusions

During the first year of the current FREP agreement the "California Certified Crop Adviser Program" made many significant program advancements, including the relocation of administrative offices to Sacramento, improvement of administrative functions and interaction with the Board and volunteer leadership. After meeting with representatives of CDFA and the industry, the program administrator has worked diligently to improve performance and move the CCA program forward in California. The CA CCA Board has expressed satisfaction with current program performance and progress. However, the Board remains concerned regarding potential complete privatization of CA CCA funding, and select members of the Board have raised this concern with FREP. Upon request of the CA CCA Board, the WGA submitted a new funding request to FREP in an effort to ensure continuity for the CA CCA program in California. If left entirely to private support, the Board felt program activities could begin to falter. Today, however, the CA CCA program continues to gain credibility and exposure due to the combined efforts of a committed Board of Directors and a revitalization of the administrative effort.