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# A Successful Plan is a Plan for Success

By Jason Casselman, CCA-ON

**G**rowing a crop for profit is a dynamic venture, with many considerations on how to be successful at the end of the day with more money in your pocket than when you started. Certified Crop Advisers that work in the agricultural industry are committed to assisting producers in achieving this goal.

Determining the needs of individual producers is the first step in developing a plan that provides solutions to meet these needs. The basic crop plan that a CCA can develop with a producer covers crop rotation, nutrient management, integrated pest management, harvest management and record keeping.

## Crop Rotation

Crop rotation plans should be designed to improve yield and profitability over time by controlling weeds, breaking disease cycles, reducing soil erosion, improving soil tilth, and increasing soil organic matter. Plans also assist in seed variety/ hybrid selection, determining seed treatment needs, developing herbicide group rotation, and accounting for previous legume crop nitrogen credits. A diversified crop rotation with cover crops, herbicide tolerant crops, and identity preserved crops all with different hybrid names and varieties is very complex and can be a challenge to manage. A written crop rotation plan helps deal with this complexity, improving the overall implementation of the crop rotations.

## Nutrient Management

Nutrient management plans will match production goals with optimizing profitability and reducing environmental risk. Nutrient application rates are determined based on soil tests, source nutrient content, the crop to be grown and expected yield. The plan includes identifying where nutrients should not be applied or where the rates should be reduced. Soil sample information and the recommendations that go along with them can help identify fields that are lacking in certain nutrients required to maintain high quality crop production. Accounting for residual nutrients can save money and is environmentally sound.

## Integrated Pest Management

An integrated pest management (IPM) plan deals with individual pests but is also a systems approach. Implementing an IPM plan includes targeting pesticide applications, considering alternative forms of control, and identifying economic thresholds for specific pests. The plan identifies types of pests from previous years and future potential for pest infestation. It presents a strategy to eliminate pests from field margins and non-crop areas, a rotation of crop varieties and species to minimize pests, an in-field scouting program during the cropping season, ways to maximize crop health to ensure minimum pest impact, and control mechanisms including

cultural, mechanical, chemical and biological controls. Monitoring and recording the success of these activities is also an integral part of the plan.

## Harvest Management

Harvest management plans start right from seed maturity selection, planting date and season length. Achieving the highest quality crop at harvest is the goal of a harvest management plan. The plan includes an awareness of pre-harvest intervals for any products used on the crop. Timing of swathing, desiccating, pulling and threshing is planned based on optimizing quality, yield and profitability.

## Record Keeping

Record keeping ties all the information together from the planning stages right through to the execution and the results of the crop year. This information is invaluable as a reference for evaluating and fine-tuning production aspects. Record keeping is required as part of the due diligence in farming operations and is a minimum standard of care. The year-end summary of the operation gauges profitability and viability of the operation.

Growing crops for profit does have its challenges and is dynamic but by working with a Certified Crop Adviser who has the expertise and knowledge to offer insight in determining the needs of the cropping operation, the solutions to these needs can be met in a year round crop plan. A successful plan is a plan for success.

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*There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower's interests first.*



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*This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice. This article was written by one of those CCA's.*