

2019 - 2021 Strategic Plan

ONTARIO CERTIFIED CROP ADVISOR ASSOCIATION

I. WHY WE EXIST

Mission and Vision

Mission

The International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) Program validates the credentials of professional crop advisers by upholding standards for knowledge, experience, ethics and continuing education.

The Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Association maintains the professional standards of the certification while representing Certified Crop Advisors to Ontario agriculture.

Vision Statement

To be recognized as the highest standard of certification a trusted professional crop advisor can hold.

Organization Profile and History

The Certified Crop Adviser Program (CCA) is one of the professional certification programs offered by the American Society of Agronomy (ASA). It is a voluntary program setting a base standard of agronomic expertise through testing and documentation of work experience, and then raising that standard through continuing education.

The program is administered within a state/region/province by a local Board of Directors. The Ontario Board consists of representatives from government (federal and provincial), agricultural research, agribusiness, and practicing Certified Crop Advisors.

The Ontario CCA Board has been in existence since 1996, three years after the first exams were launched in the U.S. The certification was very quickly adopted by crop advisers in Ontario and we achieved over 300 certified members within two years. Our membership has grown to over 650 in 2019.

In 2016, we were the first Canadian CCA Board, and one of only 10 in North American, to offer the 4R Nutrient Management Specialty. In 2019, we launched the Resistance Management Specialty; again the first CCA Board in Canada to do so.

Our local program has traditionally been one of the more progressive Boards in the program. It is the intent of the Ontario CCA Board to maintain those high standards and also to increasingly search for ways to deliver increased value to our CCA members and their employers.

II. WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH

To determine where the Ontario CCA Board should focus efforts over the next three years, the Board conducted three surveys of CCA members, CCA employers, and other agricultural stakeholders in January 2019. CCAs and their employers were asked about their satisfaction with their CCA designation, the activities of the Ontario CCA Association and feedback on what could be done better. Other industry stakeholders were asked about their perception of the CCA designation in terms of value to and role in Ontario crop production.

The results of the surveys were considered by the Ontario CCA Board as part of a strategic planning exercise in March 2019 to help pinpoint activities that should be added, deleted or changed. A summary of the critical issues and opportunities from the survey responses are provided here as they set the context for the strategic goals and actions identified by the Board for inclusion in this three-year strategic plan.

Critical Issues and Opportunities

When asked what value the CCA designation and CCAs in general provide to crop production and to growers, both employers and other stakeholders ranked the following responses as the top three selections:

- sets a benchmark for education and experience;
- encourages crop advisors to complete continuing education and stay current on innovations; and,
- provides credibility and professionalism to the role of crop advising.

Over sixty-two percent (62.5%) of employers felt the CCA designation added a lot of value to their company's reputation and credibility. The remaining 37.5% said it added some value. Ninety-four percent (94%) of CCA respondents felt the designation added some or a lot of value to their personal reputation and credibility. Overall, 85% of CCAs were either very satisfied (54%) or somewhat satisfied (31%) with the CCA designation and their association membership.

All three groups were asked what role they felt the Ontario CCA Association should fill in the crop production sector and regarding representing CCAs. Informing the membership of important issues and news items was identified by all three groups. The other industry stakeholders and employers felt it is important the designation encourages CCAs to continue their education. The CCAs value having an association to represent them and to promote the designation. There was consensus amongst the groups that the association should not be involved in government lobbying or political issues.

Respondents were asked to identify the top three agronomic issues or opportunities for CCAs and their grower customers and the responses were relatively consistent. Nutrient stewardship practices, resistance management, and soil health appeared in the lists for all surveyed groups.

Regarding the top three issues facing the crop production sector more broadly, public scrutiny or lack of public trust and potential for increased regulatory control appeared on all three survey summaries.

CCAs and their employers listed recruiting and retaining employees to work in agriculture as another top issue whereas the other industry stakeholder group selected increasing data collection capability without corresponding analytical expertise.

CCAs were asked what additional benefits or activities they would like to see CCA Ontario offer or become involved in. The top two selections were: more marketing and promotion of the CCA designation aimed at growers; and providing a stronger provincial voice with respect to issues that affect CCAs. A distant third was organizing and hosting educational webinars.

III. HOW WE WILL GO ABOUT DOING IT

Stakeholder Engagement

1. Goal – Enhance the profile of CCAs and the association with external stakeholder groups.

Strategies and Actions

- Circulate the CCA newsletter to other stakeholders.
- Support CCA representation on external committees which focus on relevant agronomic topics. The Board will appoint or approve representatives who are to report back to the Board regarding committee activities.
- Engage with policy development on agriculture support programs which will have direct involvement of or impact on CCAs, e.g. OSCIA, OMAFRA, conversation authorities, Agricorp, municipalities, etc.
- Consider expanding the number of non-voting liaison members on the Board to include additional partners.

2. Goal – Increase the involvement of CCAs and the association in setting and directing Ontario agronomic research.

Strategies and Actions

- Survey CCAs annually regarding current priority research needs. Share this information and results with other groups. The survey could be launched at the conference each year.
- Form a CCA Research and Innovation Committee. Responsibilities could include devising the annual research survey, disseminating the results, and identifying locations for CCA tours (see Leadership and Development, Goal 2, activity four).
- Consider having an ‘Innovation Award’ presented at the CCA Conference along with the Award of Excellence and potentially link the innovation to a specialty area.

Leadership and Development

3. Goal – Increase the leadership capacity within the CCA membership.

Strategies and Actions

- Organize a public speaking and media training workshop for CCAs.

4. Goal – Provide CCAs with an opportunity to learn and network with other CCAs.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop more formalized guidelines around the CCA-to-CCA mentorship program.
- Collaborate with other CCA Boards to connect CCAs who are interested in an exchange.
- Consider whether there are opportunities for CEUs for participation in the mentorship program and exchange program.
- Facilitate CCA tours to support CCA learning opportunities. This could include crop tours, bus trips to out of province conferences, open houses at companies to showcase innovations, etc.
- Establish a chatroom type forum for CCAs to share information and leverage their collective knowledge.

Marketing, Communications, Recruitment and Promotion

5. Goal – Prioritize and formalize the marketing goals and activities of the Ontario CCA Association

Strategies and Actions

- Develop a marketing and communications plan setting out activities for the next three years.
- Redefine the role of the CCA Marketing Committee to align with the marketing and communications plan.

6. Goal - Enhance the profile and awareness of CCAs and the certification program with growers.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop a desk sign for event displays, e.g. "Proud supporter, Ask me about the CCA certification program."
- Survey farmers regarding their opinion and role of CCAs.
- Provide CCAs with a list of suggestions on how to market themselves as CCAs, put on website and in newsletter.

7. Goal – Raise awareness of the CCA certification program with potential new CCAs.

Strategies and Actions

- Enlist CCAs to actively seek opportunities to promote the certification when speaking to classes or school clubs.
- Develop a resource kit of slides, speaking notes and key messages to support a consistent presentation.
- Explore opportunities to partner with AgScape on agriculture in the classroom type activities.

8. Goal – Improve the effectiveness of the CCA website as a source of information to CCAs, growers and potential new CCAs.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop a frequently asked questions section on the website for existing and potential CCAs.
- Place more CCA profiles on the website, e.g. Award of Excellence winner.

Member Services/Value

9. Goal – Support CCAs to maintain their certification and remain in the crop input industry.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop a policy regarding CEU requirements for CCAs on extended medical employment leaves.
- Promote the existence of the CCA Retired designation and the criteria surrounding it.
- Encourage retired CCAs to become involved in the CCA-to-CCA mentorship program and speak at educational events.

10. Goal – Increase the number and value of learning opportunities especially for unique or non-traditional topics.

Strategies and Actions

- Offer more webinars for CCAs with CEUs and especially horticulture topics.
- Explore the feasibility of developing a horticulture specialty.
- Schedule at least one horticulture presentation at the annual conference and consider a separate break-out session.
- Routinely remind and encourage horticulture event organizers to apply for CEUs.

IV. ACTION PLAN AND TIMELINE

Goal	Action	Priority	Target Completion or Current Status	Responsibility
Enhance the profile of CCAs and the association with external stakeholder groups.	Circulate the CCA newsletter to other stakeholders.	Short-term	By December 31, 2019 – complete April 2019 and on-going	Staff
	Support CCA representation on external committees which focus on relevant agronomic topics.	As required, long-term	On-going	Board
	Engage with policy development on agriculture support programs which will have direct involvement of or impact on CCAs.	As required, long-term	On-going	Board
	Consider expanding the number of non-voting liaison members on the Board to include additional partners.	Long-term	By March 2020 – GFO invited as guest to March Board meeting	Board

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Goal	Action	Priority	Target Completion or Current Status	Responsibility
Increase the involvement of CCAs and the association in setting and directing Ontario agronomic research.	Survey CCAs annually regarding current priority research needs. Share this information and results with other groups.	Short-term	By March 31, 2020	Staff, Research and Innovation Committee
	Form a CCA Research and Innovation Committee.	Short-term	By January 31, 2020 – Terms of Reference drafted and initial members identified	Staff, Board
	Consider having an 'Innovation Award' presented at the CCA Conference along with the Award of Excellence and potentially link the innovation to a specialty area.	Mid-term	By January 2021	Staff, Research and Innovation Committee
Increase the leadership capacity within the CCA membership.	Organize a public speaking and media training workshop for CCAs.	Mid-term	By March 2020	Board, Staff
Provide CCAs with an opportunity to learn and network with other CCAs.	Develop more formalized guidelines around the CCA-to-CCA mentorship program.	Short-term	By January 2020 – Completed July 2019	Staff, Mentorship Committee
	Collaborate with other CCA Boards to connect CCAs who are interested in an exchange.	Mid-term	By January 2021	Staff, Mentorship Committee
	Consider whether there are opportunities for CEUs for participation in the mentorship program and exchange program.	Short- to Mid-term	On-going	Staff, CEU Committee
	Facilitate CCA tours to support CCA learning opportunities.	Mid-term	By December 2020	Staff, Research and Innovation Committee
	Establish a chatroom type forum for CCAs to share information and leverage their collective knowledge.	Mid-term	Add to March 2020 Board agenda for discussion – Perhaps gear towards horticulture topics.	Staff, Social Media Committee or could be a mentorship program project for 2020-2021
Prioritize and formalize marketing goals and activities.	Develop a marketing and communications plan setting out activities for the next three years.	Mid-term	By March 2020	Board, Marketing Committee, Staff

Goal	Action	Priority	Target Completion or Current Status	Responsibility
	Redefine the role of the CCA Marketing Committee to align with the marketing and communications plan.	Mid-term	By March 2020	Board, Marketing Committee, Staff
Enhance the profile and awareness of CCAs and the certification program with growers.	Develop a desk sign for event displays, e.g. "Proud supporter, Ask me about the CCA certification program."	Short-term	By December 2019 – Now considering an office window cling rather than sign.	Staff, Marketing Committee
	Survey farmers regarding their opinion and role of CCAs.	Short-term	By December 2019 – Completed September 2019 – Redo every three years	Staff, Leigh Hudson, Mentorship Committee
	Provide CCAs with a list of suggestions on how to market themselves as CCAs, put on website and in newsletter.	Short-term	By December 2019 – Completed April 2019	Staff
Raise awareness of the CCA certification program with potential new CCAs.	Enlist CCAs to actively seek opportunities to promote the certification when speaking to classes or school clubs.	Mid- to Long-term	By November 2019 – Promote to CCAs, confirm details around available pizza funding	Board, Marketing Committee
	Develop a resource kit of slides, speaking notes and key messages to support a consistent presentation.	Mid-term to Long-term	November 2019 – Promote the existence of the generic slide deck	Staff, Marketing Committee
	Explore opportunities to partner with AgScape on agriculture in the classroom type activities.	Mid- to Long-term	By March 2020 – AgScape invited to give presentation at March meeting	Board, Marketing Committee
Improve the effectiveness of the CCA website as a source of information to CCAs, growers and potential new CCAs.	Develop a frequently asked questions section on the website for existing and potential CCAs.	Short-term	By December 2019 – Completed October 2019	Staff
	Place more CCA profiles on the website, e.g. Award of Excellence winner.	Short-term	By December 2019 – First profile completed April 2019, ongoing	Staff
Support CCAs to maintain their certification and remain in the crop input industry.	Develop a policy regarding CEU requirements for CCAs on extended medical employment leaves.	Short-term	By November 2019 – Completed, policy approved	Staff, Standards and Ethics Committee

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Goal	Action	Priority	Target Completion or Current Status	Responsibility
	Promote the existence of the CCA Retired designation and the criteria surrounding it.	Short-term	By December 2019 – Completed, article in both spring and fall newsletters	Staff
	Encourage retired CCAs to become involved in the CCA-to-CCA mentorship program and speak at educational events.	Mid- to Long-term	On-going	Board, Staff, Mentorship Committee, Marketing Committee
Increase the number and value of learning opportunities especially for unique or non-traditional topics.	Offer more webinars for CCAs with CEUs and especially horticulture topics.	Short- to Mid-term	On-going	Staff, CEU Committee
	Explore the feasibility of developing a horticulture specialty.	Long-term		Board, Exam Committee
	Schedule at least one horticulture presentation at the annual conference and consider a separate break-out session.	Short-term	On-going	Staff
	Routinely remind and encourage horticulture event organizers to apply for CEUs.	Short-term	On-going	Staff, CEU Committee