

ONTARIO CCA STRATEGIC PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2025



September
2025

Ontario Certified Crop Adviser Association

This Strategic Plan will be used to help our organization do a better job - to focus its energy, to ensure that members of the Board and staff are working toward the same goals, and to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment.

Strategic Plan - 2025

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, agri-business, 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 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

In January 2019, the Ontario Board conducted three surveys of CCA members, CCA employers, and other agricultural stakeholders in order to determine where the CCA Board should focus efforts. 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 the original three-year strategic plan covering 2019-2021. The original material was subsequently reviewed and updated in March 2022 and again in September 2025.

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

There were four main themes identified during the 2019 strategy planning exercise:

- stakeholder engagement;
- leadership and development;
- marketing, communications, recruitment and promotion; and,
- member services/value.

In September 2025, the Ontario CCA Board of Directors reviewed the themes, goals, and proposed actions. Completed activities were deleted and new strategies were added.

Stakeholder Engagement

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

Strategies and Actions

- Support CCA representation on external committees which focus on relevant agronomic topics.
- Engage with policy development on agriculture support programs which will have direct involvement of or impact on CCAs, e.g., OSCIA, OMAFA, conservation authorities, Agricorp, municipalities, etc.
- Consider a CCA employer award to recognize employers who support CCAs and the CCA Program.
- Provide science-based advocacy including background information and key messages for CCAs.
- Discuss with ICCA staff and other Canadian CCA Boards the merits of organizing a Canadian Government Policy and Awareness Meeting for Canadian CCA Boards.

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

Strategies and Actions

- Survey CCAs periodically regarding current priority research needs. Share this information and results with other groups.
- Promote nominations for the 'Innovation Award' to be presented during the CCA Conference each year each.

Leadership and Development

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

Strategies and Actions

- Develop or source leadership/governance training program for new board directors.
- Provide an honorarium for CCAs who participate in the mentorship program.

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

Strategies and Actions

- Establish an online education/communication forum (WhatsApp group or Circles Chat) for CCAs to share and learn agronomic information.
- Revisit organizing a student poster session at the CCA Conference.
- Provide different colour lanyards for new CCAs/candidates for conference, and encourage older CCAs to network with them
- Recognize CCAs with commitment to continued education (80+ CEUS for cycle) at conference

Marketing, Communications, Recruitment and Promotion

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

Strategies and Actions

- Update the marketing and communications plan setting out activities for the next three years (2025 to 2028).

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

Strategies and Actions

- Redo the survey with CCAs, farmers and other stakeholders regarding their opinion and role of CCAs.
- Pitch co-branding opportunities with employers and different retailers.
- Develop badge system for educational accomplishments such as rotational grazing.

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

Strategies and Actions

- Continue to actively seek opportunities to promote the certification when speaking to classes or school clubs. This includes the pizza nights at agricultural post-secondary schools.
- Investigate opportunities to speak at non-agricultural schools, e.g., business programs.
- Connect with AgScape about profiling CCAs in any of their agricultural careers videos.
- Ensure everyone has equal opportunity to access certification.
- Offer a tuition assistance program for people who cannot afford to buy the books and take the exams.

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

Strategies and Actions

- Continue to feature CCA profiles on the website, e.g., Award of Excellence winner, “Meet Your CCA Board”, and profile new CCAs.

Member Services/Value

9. Goal – Support CCAs to maintain their certification.

Strategies and Actions

- Continue to promote the Emerging Leader recognition.
- Poll the retired CCAs and ask them what would be of value to them and keep them engaged.
- Conduct exit surveys with CCAs who do not pay their renewal or are dropped due to insufficient CEUs.
- Start a retired CCAs feature in Chatter asking them to talk about the highlights or significant lessons from their career.

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.
- 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.
- Consider developing a Horticulture Specialty either just for Ontario or in partnership with local boards with similar horticulture crops.
- Ask ICCA to open registration in Precision Ag Specialty to Ontario CCAs.

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.	Support CCA representation on external committees which focus on relevant agronomic topics.	As required, long-term	On-going	Research and Innovation Committee
	Engage with policy development on agriculture support programs which will have direct involvement of or	As required, long-term	On-going	Board

**2025
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Goal	Action	Priority	Target Completion or Current Status	Responsibility
	impact on CCAs.			
	Consider an employer award for employers of CCAs	Mid-term	Announce first recipient January 2027	Staff, Awards Committee
	Provide science-based advocacy including background information and key messages for CCAs	As required, long-term	On-going	Staff, Research and Innovation Committee
	Discuss with ICCA a Canadian Government Policy and Awareness Meeting for Canadian CCA Boards	Mid-term	Fall 2026	Staff, ICCA, Board
Increase the involvement of CCAs and the association in setting and directing Ontario agronomic research.	Survey CCAs periodically regarding current priority research needs. Share this information and results with other groups.	Long-term	On-going, next one complete by February 2026	Staff, Research & Innovation Committee
	Promote nominations for 'Innovation Award'.	Long-term	On-going	Staff, Research & Innovation Committee
Increase the leadership capacity within the CCA membership.	Develop or source leadership/governance training for new board directors.	Mid-term	Full Board session – spring 2026 then just with new directors	Staff, Executive
	Honorarium for CCAs in mentorship program.	Short-term	Announce for 2026 intake	Staff, Mentorship Committee
Provide CCAs with an opportunity to learn and network with other CCAs.	Establish an online education/communication forum for CCAs	Mid-term	2026	Marketing Committee
	Revisit student poster session	Long-term	As suitable events are planned	Staff, Marketing Committee (promote to students)
	Differentiate new CCAs and CCA candidates at conference via lanyards	Short-term	Implement at 2026 conference	Staff
	Recognize CCAs with 80+ CEUs	Short-term	Implement at 2026 conference	Staff
Prioritize and formalize marketing goals and activities.	Update the marketing and communications plan setting out activities for the next three years.	Short-term	Complete by December 31, 2026	Board, Marketing Committee, Staff

Enhance the profile and awareness of CCAs and the certification program with growers.	Redo the survey with CCAs, farmers and other stakeholders regarding their opinion and role of CCAs.	Mid-term	Launch in fall of 2026 at OFA	Staff, Executive
	Pitch co-branding with CCA employers	Long-term	On-going	Staff, Marketing Committee
	Develop badge system for educational accomplishments	Mid- to long-term	Investigate feasibility over 2026	Staff
Raise awareness of the CCA certification program with potential new CCAs.	Continue to actively seek opportunities to promote CCA to classes and schools.	Long-term	On-going	Marketing Committee
	Investigate opportunities to speak at non-agricultural schools, e.g., business programs.	Long-term	On-going	Marketing Committee
	Connect with AgScape about profiling CCAs	Mid-term	Initial connection by Spring 2026	Staff to make initial contact
	Ensure equal opportunity to access certification.	Long-term	On-going	Staff, Board
	Offer a tuition assistance program.	Mid-term	Proposal by Spring Board meeting 2026	Staff to develop criteria for Board review
Support CCAs to maintain their certification	Continue to promote the Emerging Leader recognition	Long-term	On-going	Staff, Marketing Committee
	Poll the retired CCAs regarding value to keep them engaged	Short-term	By January 2026 and on-going	Staff
	Conduct exit surveys with CCAs	Long-term	On-going	Staff
	Start a retired CCA feature in the Chatter	Mid-term	First in spring 2026 newsletter	Staff

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-term	On-going	Staff
	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
	Consider developing a Horticulture Specialty	Mid-term	Explore feasibility in 2026	Staff, Exam Committee
	Ask ICCA to open Precision Ag Specialty to Ontario CCAs	Short-term	By January 2026	Staff