

Certification Update: Certification Specialties for CPSS, CCA

There are many people doing soils-related work who may not have the formal education in soil science as described to qualify for the Certified Professional Soil Science (CPSS) program. They may have a bachelor's degree or higher in ecology, environmental science, biology, or some related discipline, but not all of the soil science course work. This individual would not qualify for CPSS due to the course work requirement, and currently there is no certification that would meet their needs, but that is about to change.



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In January 2017, the Soils Certifying Board will launch a new soils-focused certification—Certified Soil Technician (CST). This certification will be for individuals who are doing soil science-related work but do not have the B.S.-level education in soil science or the amount of course work needed to qualify for the CPSS program. The CST certification will require passing the Fundamentals in Soil Science exam and signing the same code of ethics as the CPSS certification, but the years of experience requirement will be fewer at three years and the education requirement will be an associate degree with at least seven semester credits in soils along with three references. The CST certification does not replace or compete with CPSS or APSS. Each has different requirements, and CST could be a step towards CPSS if the individual would decide to return to school to earn the necessary course work.

Like many professions, CST, APSS, and CPSS have different levels of knowledge and skills proven through examination and documentation of experience and education. Jobs follow the same pattern, so it is not expected that a CST would be doing the same things as a CPSS. Each certification will serve different audiences, even some that might be new to SSSA.

The CST certification will not be available in states that have state soils licensing programs. Please visit www.soils.org/certifications for more details about CST, APSS, and CPSS as well as the licensing states' requirements. If you are in a soil science licensing state, you want to make sure you follow their procedures to become licensed.

Change for CPSS

The Soils Certifying Board while designing CST also reviewed the requirements for CPSS, evaluating data around the soils exams and statistics related to the programs. Although the exam data is sound for both the fundamentals

and professional practices exams, the board decided that the professional practices exam was not needed for someone to become a CPSS. So starting in 2017, the CPSS certification will no longer require the professional practices exam but will still require the fundamentals exam. This

will create a clearer distinction between certification and state licensing. States that have soil science/classifier licensing programs and use the professional practices exam will continue to do so, and SSSA will continue to provide it.

CCA Specialty Certifications

"I'm glad you are doing this. I need the help and don't have the time." That's what an Illinois farmer told me when he heard me talk about the CCA specialties that were being developed, specifically, the Sustainability (SSp) certification.

The ICCA program launched the 4R nutrient management specialist (4R NMS) certification in 2015. This year, we added two more, SSp and IPM Resistance Management (RMS). All three are off to a good start, and while none are mandatory, you do have to be a CCA first before adding one or more of the specialties.

The registration deadline for the 3 Feb. 2017 exam is 9 December. Each specialty requires passing a scenario-based, multiple-choice exam to earn it and additional CEUs in the related category to maintain it with the 40 total CEU minimum remaining unchanged. Go to www.certifiedcropadviser.org/exams for more details.

I'm asked at times why we need these specialty certifications—isn't CCA good enough? Certainly the CCA certification is great and has defined the profession of crop advising. It's not a matter of being good enough. It's not a matter of being good enough. I like to use the comparison of the medical professions. There are family practice doctors, generalists, and there are medical specialists. The CCA is the broad scope, agronomy generalist while one of the specialties has a more narrow focus and adds more knowledge in that area. It allows and supports CCAs who have focused their work in one of these areas to gain more recognition and build awareness for their professional expertise. It is also helping to meet a need as described by government agencies, industry professionals, and farmers.

The 4R NMS certification is currently available in 17 states and one Canadian province with plans to expand it to all states and provinces over the coming year or two. The SSp certification is available in all states while RMS is available in all states except California and Arizona.

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