

Providing Training and Education for Advanced and Beginner Certified Crop Advisors in the Northeast

Principal Investigators

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Executive Summary

Each year, hundreds of prospective certified crop advisors (CCA's) prepare for the certification exams across the country. This certification is required by many reputable independent crop consulting firms for their scouts and consultants to ensure that they hire only the best and most well-informed applicants. Each region of the country has its own certification exam, including the Northeast region. Preparation for the Northeast region certification involves a three day intensive training in Syracuse in November, followed by self-study with online tutorial videos, and finally two exams in February. Once certified, CCA's must also earn annual continuing education credits to retain their certification and to stay current on relevant issues. One way to accomplish that is by attending the annual advanced training sessions. The NYS IPM field crops and livestock team has been an integral partner working with the CCA board toward developing and providing training materials for exam preparation and hosting annual advanced training sessions for continuing education credits. In 2018 and 2019, we developed video courses for the IPM, Disease Management, and Insect Management sections of the basic training curriculum. Each year we are invited to provide in-person advanced training sessions on topics such as managing early-season bird damage with Avipel seed treatment, biocontrol of the cereal leaf beetle, scouting tactics and IPM approaches to pest management, the expansion and management of the soybean cyst nematode, neonicotinoid seed treatment alternatives, and dung beetles. We also host the pest management Q&A sessions annually. All trainings and videos reach hundreds of current and prospective CCA's and emphasize the importance of understanding and implementing integrated pest management tactics for all diseases and pests.

Issue

As Cornell's field crops extension faculty dwindle in number and availability, the Northeast Certified Crop Advisors board needs more involvement and contribution towards improved basic and advanced training methods, resources and topics. With a recent change in the basic training format from three day in-person lectures to online videos and two day in-person Q&A sessions for each topic, new resources needed to be developed; not to mention issues with COVID requiring even more remote-learning opportunities. Extension faculty were reluctant to develop the necessary training videos, and therefore requested that the NYS IPM field crops and livestock program step in to develop the videos and prepare and host the Q&A sessions on IPM and insect and disease management. And, with fewer faculty available to host advanced training sessions, the CCA board also requests the NYS IPM team to host at least one session each year on a current topic of interest.

Progress Summary

Between the 2018 - 2020 annual CCA trainings, we developed four videos to cover the curricula for the IPM, Disease Management and Insect Management core competency trainings. The students are expected to watch the videos and come prepared for the in-person Q&A sessions. We (Ken Wise, Jaime Cummings and Dan Olmstead) have also hosted field crop advanced training sessions for continuing education credits covering various IPM projects such as the Avipel seed treatment study, NEWA tools for field crops, biocontrol of the cereal leaf beetle, scouting tactics and IPM approaches to pest management, the expansion and management of the soybean cyst nematode, neonicotinoid seed treatment alternatives, and dung beetles. Additionally, the NYS IPM vegetable team (Abby Seaman and Marion Zuefle) has participated by providing a “vegetable school” on the final day of the advanced training sessions in 2019.

Expected and Observed Impact

Overall, the training videos have received positive feedback and are considered very useful resources for exam preparation, when paired with the study manuals. Our in-person advanced training sessions on various relevant topics have also been well-attended and receive positive feedback. Jaime was elected to serve a three year term on the northeast region CCA Exam Committee in 2019. In 2020, Jaime was elected as a member at large to the northeast region CCA Board and will serve in this position for three years. These positions ensure an IPM presence on these boards.

Our involvement in the CCA trainings ensures that the message of the importance and usefulness of an integrated pest management approach is received by all crop consultants, young and old, working in the northeast. It’s important that we train and remind them to scout and pay attention to thresholds to avoid unnecessary pesticide applications, while deploying the best management practices for each situation. This involvement positions the NYS IPM program as a strong resource and collaborator for the northeast CCA board and ensures networking and strong relationships with crop consultants and agribusiness associates.

Project Conclusion

We will continue to participate in the annual CCA basic and advance training and Q&A sessions in future years in order to provide CCA’s with the best IPM information and recommendations available.