

Preparing for the CCA exam

Like many of you, I have been working in agriculture for many years. But I finally got around to becoming a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) this last year. I must admit, I was a little apprehensive about taking the test and going through the process of becoming certified. Since I have recently successfully completed this process, I thought it might be useful to pass on some tips and advice to help you prepare for upcoming tests.

Becoming a CCA consists of four steps:

1. Pass two comprehensive exams
2. Have two years of experience with a Bachelor of Science Degree in agriculture or four years with no degree
3. Document your education and work experience
4. Agree to uphold the CCA Code of Ethics

There are two parts of the exam to become a CCA. First, there is an international portion of the exam (ICCA) that covers the fundamentals of crop production for anyone in North America. The second test covers areas that a CCA working on California ought to know. Since California has such a diverse and specialized agriculture, this part of the test focuses primarily on the fundamentals of western agriculture. Both exams are given in August and February in various locations in the state.

The best way to prepare for the International portion of the exam is to study the book: "Preparing for the International Certified Crop Advisor Exam". This material is great for brushing up on the material that will be covered in the exam. It is available for purchase on-line at <http://ppi-store.stores.yahoo.net/ccamanual.html> or by calling the International Plant Nutrition Institute at 770-825-8084. Reviewing the material in this book is definitely the best place to start.

The International CCA Exam is divided into four parts:

- Nutrient Management
- Soil and Water Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Crop Management

The thing that caused me grief during the exam was the IPM section. If you are a PCA, you do not need to take this part of the test. I work mostly with nutrients, so I do not have a current PCA license. When I was studying for the test, all the insect pictures in the study guide were in black and white and I was feeling pretty confident. On the exam, all the pictures were in color and did not look much like the ones I had studied! Luckily, I squeaked by with a passing grade on this section!

To prepare for the California portion of the exam, there are several excellent resources available. I would begin by looking over the specific California study objectives to become familiar with the local expectations

https://www.agronomy.org/cca/pdf/obj_ca.pdf

Next, check your preparedness for the local exam by using the on-line self test at <http://agronomyexamsystem.plantsciences.ucdavis.edu/>. This is a great way to assess your need for further study, plus you get instant feedback on the test.

Another useful resource is the free on-line text book “Soils in Our Environment” (Gardiner and Miller). This excellent text book can be viewed at www.prenhall.com/soils. This site also has many helpful self tests which are accessed by selecting a specific chapter in the upper left corner of the web page.

The “Western Fertilizer Handbook” has long been the basic study guide for the California CCA exam. It is a very comprehensive and useful reference for a variety of crop production issues. This book is produced by the Western Plant Health Association.

The goal of the California CCA Board is to have every qualified test-taker pass the exam on the first try. To help with this, they sponsor Exam Training Sessions prior to each scheduled test. This gives you the opportunity to meet with a specialist to review the important materials and ask any lingering questions prior to the exam. Check out the California CCA website to get the details of upcoming training sessions (<http://www.cacca.org/>)

I know that preparing for the CCA exams can be intimidating. But I now know that when you take the time to use the available study guides, go to the training sessions, take the practice tests, and ask questions- you can successfully pass the tests. Then you will be on your way to demonstrating your high level of professionalism by becoming a CCA.

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