

Chartered Agriculturalist (CAg) – A New Industry Accreditation Scheme for Professionals in Australian Agriculture

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Abstract

The Royal Commission into the Banking and Financial Services Sector has raised the need for good governance, including practical ethics, for advisors in the financial sector. It is only a matter of time before the same scrutiny is applied to advisors and consultants in other industries, including agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). An industry-wide Chartered Agricultural Scheme was launched on 28 November 2018, which places the agricultural sector in a strong position, providing an aspirational pathway for emerging professionals to build their capability to serve clients, i.e. growers, corporations, governments and other organisations in the sector. In addition, the scheme would enable agricultural professionals to be recognised for their contribution as industry leaders and place a greater industry focus on professionalism and ethics. The Chartered Agriculturalist (CAg) is such a scheme and it has been designed and developed by the Ag Institute of Australia (AIA). CAg has been designed to recognise individuals that demonstrate expertise, experience, technical certification, a practical knowledge of ethics, continued professional development (CPD), leadership and other professional skills in the agricultural industry. This scheme is open to AIA members and agricultural professionals who are members of organisations such as the Soil Science Society of Australia, Agronomy Society of Australia and Australian Society of Animal Production. The CAg scheme will help provide protection for, and maintain the reputation and service delivery capability of all professionals and advisors in the agricultural sector. It is an umbrella program enabling applicants to gain recognition for their routine CPD, formal qualifications and experience, which includes the investment agronomists make in their existing professional development as part of their everyday jobs. The program is designed to encourage agriculturalists to grow professionally.

Key Words

Agricultural accreditation, consultant, professional development, Certified Crop Advisor, Chartered Agriculturalist

Introduction

The need for good governance, including practical ethics, for advisors in the financial sector was raised in the Royal Commission into the Banking and Financial Services Sector (Cosgrove 2018). It will only be a matter of time before the same intensity of scrutiny is applied to other industries including agriculture and NRM.

In North America, there are 3,600 retail crop input outlets, 22,000 retail agricultural staff who advise farmers, 13,000 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), and 3,000 Certified Professional Agronomists (CPAg (US)), and a further 3,000 private independent consulting agronomists (Jensen and Norton 2017). In the United States, agricultural professionals are either regarded as CCA or CPAg (US) and both schemes are administered by the American Society for Agronomy (Certified Crop Adviser 2019). In some US States, there is a mandatory requirement for professionals to be accredited and licenced. For example, in California, an agriculture pest control adviser (PCA) licence is required for anyone to offer a recommendation on any agricultural use of pesticides, to sell services as an authority on any agricultural pesticide use or solicit services or sales for agricultural pest management. In Canada, over 10,000 professionals are registered as professional Agrologists. Agrology (the term used for Agricultural and Natural Resource Management Professionals) is provincially regulated as a profession and each province has its own Act to regulate and register professionals. The provincial institute regulates its registered members to ensure that they provide the public with safe, competent and ethical practice (Agrologist Agronome Canada 2019).

In Australia, several programs cover technical accreditation of those working in agronomy and agriculture. The Ag Institute of Australia (AIA) has the Certified Practising Agriculturalist (CPAg: a professional development-based scheme), with more than 1000 members. The Soil Science Society of Australia administers the Certified Practising Soil Scientist (CPSS) which has 136 members accredited (see

<https://www.soilscienceaustralia.com.au/cpss/>). The AgSafe® accreditation program has around 5,000 registrations on the database for safe handling and storage of farm supplies, and the Fertcare® program has accredited 268 advisors for the fertiliser industry. Both latter programs provide premises accreditation with around 1,080 Fertcare® and 1,200 AgSafe® accredited premises (Jensen and Norton 2017). In addition, Irrigation Australia also provides specialist accreditation such as Certified Irrigation Professional (see <https://www.irrigationaustralia.com.au/certification/>). In Australia, there is no over-arching accreditation in non-technical, professional competencies such as ethics, business management and governance, communication, industry engagement and leadership.

This paper introduces the Chartered Agriculturalist (CAG) scheme which has been developed by the AIA as a “whole-of-industry” accreditation program, which is designed to be over-arching. It was launched in November 2018 by the AIA (GRDC 2019). The CAG scheme builds upon the AIA’s CPAg program, and is designed to recognise individuals that demonstrate expertise, experience, relevant accreditation and certifications, a practical knowledge of ethics, leadership and professional skills in the agricultural industry and those maintaining continuing professional development (CPD). The scheme is open to AIA members - all new members of which are now required to be CPAg as part of their ongoing membership - and non-member agricultural professionals.

Requirements of the CAg scheme

CAg seeks to recognise high levels of expertise, ethics and knowledge across the whole agricultural industry, with associated rigorous requirements and eligibility for AIA members and non-members alike. Professionals from other affiliated organisations that apply to the CAg scheme will use their relevant association’s technical recognition requirements, ensuring applicants are technically certified by that particular association. The AIA, as the “steward” for the CAg scheme, therefore, will not undertake the detailed evaluation of technical competence of applicants from outside the AIA. The technical evaluation will be undertaken by subject matter experts within the applicant’s own association such as the Soil Science Society of Australia or the Agronomy Society of Australia. Hence, the applicants do not need to be AIA members to be eligible for CAg status. We note however that the AIA has a professional grading of CPAg for this purpose. The pathway for becoming Chartered is shown in Figure 1.



*CPSS – Certified Practising Soil Scientist.

Figure 1. Pathways to Chartered Agriculturalist (CAg) status

When a professional applies to be Chartered, they need to demonstrate that they are recognised i.e. accredited, by an affiliated organisation. Applicants can then complete the next steps towards becoming a CAg. The scheme recognises agricultural industry leaders and the scheme is robust and professional in assessing

applicants. Table 1 outlines the professional standards requirements for CAg. The requirements for becoming Chartered are listed in items 1-7 in the following subsections:

Table 1. Professional standards requirements for the Chartered Agriculturalist (CAg) scheme.

Requirements & Criteria	Chartered Professional
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates advanced and integrated understanding of a complex body of agricultural knowledge through their contribution to a significant program or project. • Interprets, applies and contributes knowledge to develop sustainable solutions to significant agricultural and natural resource management problems and opportunities. • Contributes demonstrable positive impact on policy or an industry-wide problem.
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes demonstrable, positive, professional contributions at the industry level including to industry committees and other relevant agricultural bodies and agencies. • Recognised expert in specialised field(s) of expertise. • Demonstrable ability to lead through participation at the industry level including through industry committees and other relevant agricultural bodies and agencies, contributing to major changes and improvements.
Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepares reports that are based on justifiable and rationale investigations, analyses and conclusions. • Develops sound proposals for determining needs and priorities in agricultural and natural resource management work. • Manages the acquisition and implementation of new techniques and improvements to established protocols, methods and practices, exercising innovation and judgment. • Contributes to solving industry-wide problems.
Interpersonal skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised as a professional resource in their areas of expertise, including providing mentoring of early career professionals. • Initiates and formally contributes to discussions affecting the industry through participation in, and committee membership of, professional and/or industry groups or associations. • Maintains a network of experienced professionals
Business and organisational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides management and application of legal and other requirements of businesses and organisations relating to individuals and industries operating in agriculture and natural resource management. • May manage or have responsibilities for leading and influencing the professional development of group(s). • Consults widely with external bodies and agencies to ensure social, environmental and economic objectives are achieved at the organisational and industry level. • Through professional development, and other related activities, demonstrates an understanding of how international perspectives apply to an Australian context.

Note to Table 1: Each of the 5 requirement areas reflect generic areas for which agricultural professionals are expected to demonstrate Chartered-level ability regardless of the specific technical arenas they are working in within agriculture.

Sole traders/independent operators who don't work in a corporate environment can apply via an alternative pathway and will be consulted

1. Formal qualifications

Postgraduate training – the equivalent of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 9 to conform with international best practice. These postgraduate qualifications can be a Masters in Agriculture (or related field) or Bachelor Honours, Graduate Diploma in Agriculture or NRM and a Masters in any other area, i.e. not directly related to agriculture or NRM. This means that agricultural graduates who undertake further professional studies/experience (in any discipline), or a non-agricultural professional who undertakes agricultural studies or gains significant industry experience, can achieve CAg status. There are also alternative pathways available to applicants as the scheme recognises that there are professionals operating as industry leaders (in agriculture and NRM), working at senior levels in businesses, on industry and government boards, and industry-wide programs or projects, yet do not have AQF 9 qualifications (see CAg - the design document at www.aginstitute.com.au).

2. Professional organisation

The applicant is currently certified by a professional organisation i.e. CPAg (AIA), CPSS (Soil Science Society of Australia), Irrigation Australia etc.

3. Professional work experience

Minimum of 5 years' experience with a minimum of 3 years in a senior management position to show that you are a leader in your field.

4. Professional standards

Demonstration of your knowledge, leadership, consulting skills, and problem solving, interpersonal skills, business and organisational skills, all of which support sustainable agriculture (see Table 1).

5. Pass the ethics exam

The Ethics Policy and Code of Ethics form a foundation on which the Chartered scheme is based. Applicants are required to adhere to this policy and code and will be required to pass a timed ethics examination.

6. Show evidence of reflective learning

Successful applicants will provide evidence that they have undertaken reflective learning throughout the assessment period. This could include evidence of journal entries.

7. Maintain your status through Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Build upon your existing activities and record 60 CPD points over three years to maintain your commitment to professional development and your Chartered status. Chartered CPD activities may include attendance at conferences, conference presentations, PhD or masters or graduate diploma training, field trips, AIA or affiliated organisational CPD events.

Conclusions

Australian agriculture is a booming industry and estimates put its total value at more than \$55 billion (ABARES 2018). Yet the social licence, practices and ethics of farmers and the agricultural industry are under daily scrutiny in Australia. Further, the expectations of professionalism from consultants, from farmers (clients), industry, and government are increasing. The Chartered Agriculturalist scheme, initiated and now launched by the AIA, has been developed to deliver a new approach to professional accreditation at the highest professional grading, within the agricultural and NRM services sector in Australia. This industry-first and sector-wide encompassing scheme has been designed to be robust and fit for purpose for the next 10-20 years. CAg will not only assist agricultural professionals face the challenges of increased industry scrutiny but the scheme is expected to help them be appropriately recognised for their professionalism, ethics and technical expertise.

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