

Chris Denning:

Finding Involvement in CAPCA Rewarding

Joyce A Basan, Program/Communications Director

Chris Denning currently serves as the President of the Desert Valleys Chapter of CAPCA. He received his B.S. in Agricultural Tech Management from the University of Arizona in 2001 and received his PCA license in 2002. He also is a California CCA and holds an Arizona PCA license. The major crops he consults in are lettuce, brassicas, artichokes, and spinach.

Currently employed by Gowan Company USA, his position is the Desert Sales Rep in Arizona and Southern CA. Previous to that, Chris worked as PCA with Crop Production Services in Watsonville, CA (from 2007-2013) and as a PCA with Green Valley Farm Supply in Yuma, AZ and Gonzales, CA (2002-2006), advising in lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, Brussels sprouts, and artichoke production.

The importance of the role of the PCA was a key motivator in his choice to join the pest management profession. “I was interested in being a PCA because it is such an integral part of a crop being produced. You are monitoring the crop from the time it comes out of the ground until it goes into the carton or bin,” says Chris. “It’s a very satisfying feeling when you see a crop being harvested that you had a very important role in helping develop. I also like the fact you are communicating with all the aspects of production, from growers, to applicators, and harvesting.”

Reflecting on his 14 years as a PCA, he recognizes the changes and challenges all PCAs face: “PCAs have a lot more on their plate than when I first started. They constantly need to think about food safety issues, whether the product they are using has an MRL for a specific country the packer/shipper may ship to. Many PCAs are also heavily relied on for their grower being compliant pertaining to groundwater contamination. It’s much more responsibility than just “walking fields,” but it also brings with it a valuable service that a customer can appreciate.”

Downy mildew has been a difficult issue in lettuce and spinach in recent years for the desert. Chris explains: “Last season, PCAs reported much less pressure, but the two seasons before that were a nightmare. With the wet winter we’ve had, they are fighting it again this season. There are many good tools out there, but when the conditions are right, it seems like not much has a long residual control. Seed varieties are important but the disease is always adapting. Organic acres are constantly growing in Imperial Valley, many spinach fields have been lost because it’s such a difficult disease to overcome with conventional tools, let alone organic.”

The ever changing technologies are also something Chris keeps up on. “The automation the lettuce industry has seen in the last decade is pretty impressive” he says. “From the robotic thinning machines that are being used more and more, to more automated harvest equipment. Many advances have been made with transplanting technology that requires less labor as well.”

His involvement with CAPCA has contributed to his ongoing interaction in the industry and how he continues to educate himself. “As a manufacturer representative I sometimes rely on a customer who has more experience than I have with a particular product, or I contact



Chris Denning

CAPCA Chapter:
Desert Valleys

Education: *University of Arizona*

Family: *Wife - Jamie
Children - Andrew (6), Emily (4), Brian (1)*

Interests:
Hunting, Jeeping, Traveling to the mountains with family

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a university researcher. Who better to learn from on certain questions than the people who are using the products? As far as CAPCA helping with networking, my involvement in CAPCA has helped me establish deeper relationships with many of my customers and even some of my competitors. We all want to see our industry succeed, and CAPCA is something that brings us together for a common goal, whether it's through putting on a CEU meeting or raising money for our annual golf tournament.”

One area he wants CAPCA to keep playing an active role in is addressing the issues with public awareness. “After hearing this year's key note speaker at the CAPCA Annual Conference about the disconnect our industry has with the public, I would love to see CAPCA continue to educate its members on how we can effectively get our message out there. I know I personally would like to be better educated on the scientific arguments to make when speaking to someone about GMO's and bee health. It's easy to make general statements, but I know that's an area I would love for CAPCA to help educate its members on using science versus rhetoric.”

Involvement in leadership is helping Chris improve his own professionalism and increase his contribution to the profession.

“Serving on the Desert Valleys CAPCA board and being more aware of industry issues is something that I feel has helped me greatly,” he says. “When I was a PCA in the field, I wasn't as involved as I should have been. My excuse was always that I was too busy. I have a great respect for CAPCA members who are ‘field walking’ PCAs and involved with their local chapter. It's a challenge to be involved when you are busy with your work, but it's as important as ever. Even if the contribution of time is small, it's something.”

Chris is looking forward to the CAPCA State office's new venture: the Spring Summit and networking event. “I think it's great that CAPCA is going to hold a Summit this year in May for PCAs who are too busy to attend the Annual Conference in October. The Desert Valleys Chapter, and others, are going to benefit greatly from this. I really want to encourage the Desert members to attend and show support for something that was developed with them in mind.”

In addition to serving as the President of the Desert Valleys Chapter, Chris serves on their Scholarship, Golf Fundraiser, and Continuing Ed committees. He also serves on the Arizona Crop Protection Association Board, the industry's representation on government and legislative issues in Arizona, similar to CAPCA. 🌱