

BASIS DIPLOMA IN AGRONOMY

Background

The growing of good crops has evolved significantly over recent decades. It has changed from being mainly an art form, based on experience, to now a much more scientific process with assessments of energy, variety, nutrition, crop protection, and the environment to name just some of the complex issues involved in food production.

It has been calculated that for a successful crop to be grown, a farmer and / or his adviser have to take account of more than 16,000 factors and so reach decisions about how best to proceed at each stage of a crop's development.

To correspond with, and sometimes to lead, the detailed progression of crop production techniques, agronomists, across the UK, have been undergoing regular training programmes and acquiring new skills.

The focus of many of the recent training initiatives has been the integration of environmental and biodiversity aspects on farm, to coordinate with the latest variety, nutrition and crop protection plans. BASIS courses such as the BASIS / LEAF ICM, BETA and now the Soil and Water Management Certificate are structured to meet the needs and requirements of today's professional agronomists.

Successful in-field agronomy, applied to each decision, needs a combination of practical and academic knowledge. The skillful blend of the two elements calls for extensive and in-depth field craft along with the science of crop husbandry.

BASIS acknowledge and recognise the wide ranging demands placed on good agronomists and so have introduced the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy.

The BASIS Diploma in Agronomy

In-field advisers who have kept up-to-date with all the aspects of modern farming, need to be recognised as professional practitioners. Many agronomists do not necessarily have a degree or HND qualification but having attended the "University of Life" their experience and knowledge acquired through regular "on the job" training has given them an equivalent knowledge base. To formally position the wide range of knowledge needed by modern agronomists, BASIS has structured the attainment of the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy, with key components already in every day use, as qualification modules, leading to the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy.

The Components

Crop Protection Certificate and FACTS

The start points for the Diploma are the BASIS Crop Protection Certificate and BASIS FACTS qualifications. These two are the foundation stones of the Diploma and each must be attained if the Diploma is to be achieved. For agronomists with more experience, it may be that they have a certificate of exemption from the FACTS and / or the Crop Protection Certificate exam itself or hold the BASIS or FACTS Validated Certificate.

BETA / Conservation Management

To build in knowledge of the environment and biodiversity is essential for proper agronomic decisions. The BETA qualification is required as part of the Diploma content. It has the widely used Crop Protection Management Plan as part of its training and examination procedure. Conservation Management needs care and attention on farm, to soil, air, water, wildlife, the environment and biodiversity of species. The course is ideally suited to those managing farms, both directly and indirectly as land agents or management consultants. Any one involved in Estate Management on a broader scale would also benefit from this course.

Plant Protection Award (PPA)

The safety, application, formulation and effects of pesticides are contained in the syllabus for the PPA. It is the "Pesticide Technology" qualification and looks at the role of pesticides, in modern society, as a key component of safe food production.

Soil and Water Management Certificate

Cross Compliance, changes to the agri-environment schemes, Entry and Higher Level Schemes all place high importance on the proper management of Soil & Water. This qualification, introduced after consultation with many agricultural expert bodies, meets the requirements placed on farmers and for agronomists as part of the BASIS Diploma. Many believe that the water quality will be the **key** future issue in the agricultural environment.

Advanced Module / Advanced Nutrition Management Module

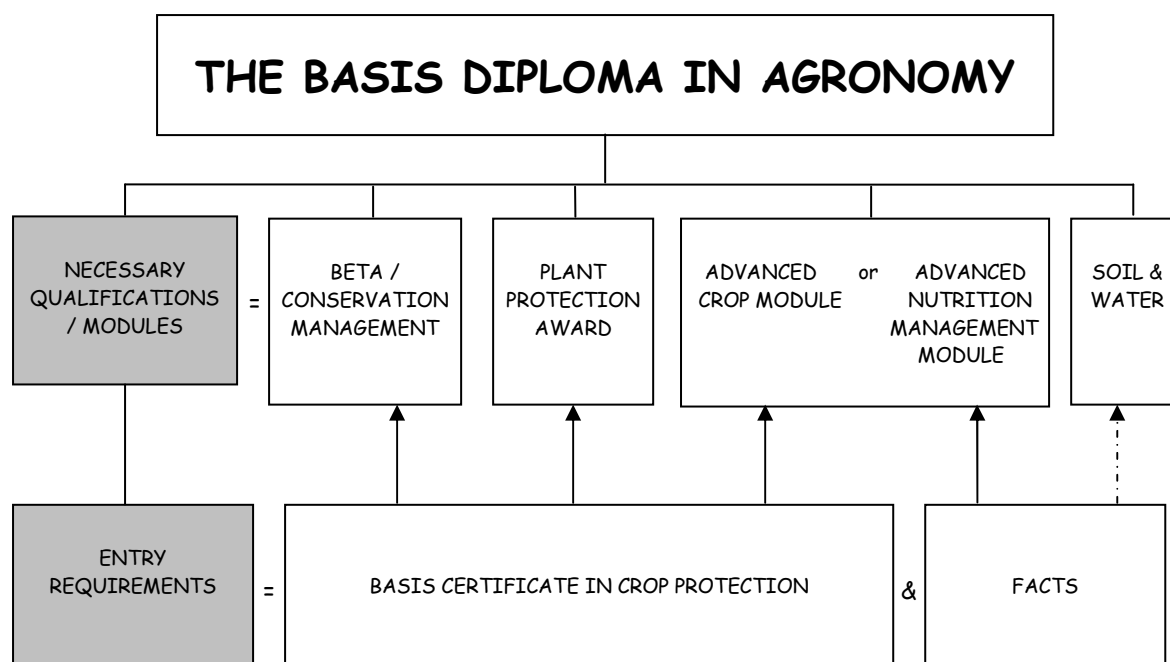
This part of the Diploma is based on a crop, or crops, in which the agronomist has, or develops, specialist knowledge. The weed, pest and disease control options along with marketing, food industry, environmental and crop assurance issues are the essential elements of this module. For the Advanced Nutrient Management Module the prior achievement of the FACTS qualification is required.

The Diploma

Once agronomists have attained all the component elements listed above then they qualify for the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy,

The first agronomists to qualify were presented with their certificates in April 2005. Many more agronomists are aiming to achieve the Diploma and are currently undergoing training to qualify in the appropriate modules.

They aim to earn the Diploma as a key achievement of their work as expert agronomists.



TOPICS COVERED

ADVANCED CROP MODULE / ADVANCED NUTRITION MANAGEMENT MODULE Weed, Pest & Disease Control, Crop Protection Programmes, Marketing, Food Industries, Crop Assurance, Nutrient Management

BETA / CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT Environment, Biodiversity, EIS's, CPMP's, ICM, Climate Change

PLANT PROTECTION AWARD (PPA) Systems & Society, Formulation, Mode of Action, Application, Health & Safety

SOIL & WATER Cultivation Types and Properties, Cropping Systems, Water Quality, Drainage, Pollution/Waste, Plant Nutrition

For the PPA and the Advanced Crop Module the prior achievement (by examination, exemption or validated certificate) of the BASIS Certificate in Crop Protection is an entry requirement. For the Advanced Nutrient Management Module the prior achievement of the FACTS qualification is required.

The FACTS qualification is a requirement for successful completion of the BASIS Diploma and strongly recommended for those wishing to train for the Soil and Water Management certificate.

Prior qualification of the BASIS Certificate in Crop Protection (or exemption or validated certificate) or the Crop Protection Management and / or POWER Certificates are required for the BETA examination. In some circumstances, it may be possible for other types of prior qualification to be taken into account for BETA examination eligibility. BASIS Approved Trainers must be assured that in such cases, the prospective candidate is capable of assimilating the knowledge imparted during the BETA course tuition and also capable of passing the BETA examination.

It is **strongly** recommended that candidates should have had at least two years experience of on-farm practical agronomy before attempting any of the modules which contribute towards the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy, but in particular before taking the Plant Protection Award.

BASIS CPD points are available for training and certification in all modules of the BASIS Diploma.

The accreditation process for our qualifications has enabled BASIS to demonstrate a high standard of training and certification for our BASIS courses. The BASIS Diploma comprises a number of modules and 6 are required to complete the qualification.

A further consequence of accreditation by HAUC and the Higher Education qualifications framework has been the development by HAUC of a Graduate Diploma in Agronomy with Environmental Management.

BASIS courses have all been awarded a number of credits based on the time spent on the course (Targeted Learning Hours). This is a recognised formula including face to face tuition time, research, reading and experiential learning. The credits are awarded at a level that reflects the intensity / difficulty of the

learning materials, for example A-level equivalent or 1st, 2nd or final year honours degree etc.

The qualifying BASIS courses with credits and levels awarded are shown below:

FACTS	
Credit Value	15
Level	Intermediate

SOIL & WATER	
Credit Value	15
Level	Honours

BASIS CROP PROTECTION	
Credit Value	30
Level	Honours

BASIS PLANT PROTECTION AWARD	
Credit Value	15
Level	Honours

BASIS ADVANCED MODULES / ADVANCED NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT MODULE	
Credit Value	15
Level	Honours

BETA / CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT	
Credit Value	15
Level	Intermediate

Intermediate = 2nd or 3rd year of university degree qualification.

Honours level - final year university degree.

Eg. FACTS 15 credits = 150 hours notional teaching time

The six modules required for the BASIS Diploma add up to 105 credits. In order to qualify for the HAUC Graduate Diploma in Agronomy with Environmental Management, candidates will need to accumulate 120 credits (ie one extra 15 credit module in addition to the BASIS Diploma). This can be any of the Advanced Crop Modules or the new Nutrient Management Planning qualification, available from September 2009.

Further details of the BASIS Diploma in Agronomy can be obtained from the BASIS office or by e-mail to sue@basis-reg.co.uk or steph@basis-reg.co.uk or amanda@basis-reg.co.uk

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