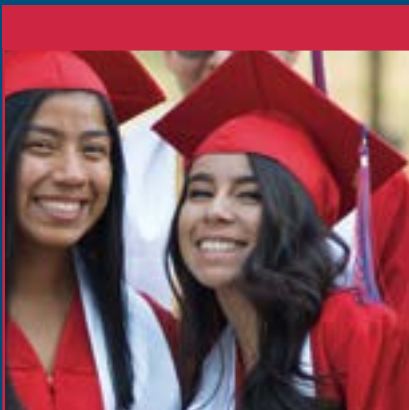


The Sky's the Limit for Ag Prep Graduates



A Proof Point for Education in
the Central Valley

Spring 2019



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By Thad Nodine

Thad Nodine is an education writer affiliated with Jobs for the Future (JFF), a Boston-based national nonprofit that provides technical assistance in support of The Wonderful Company’s education programs.

This brief about the first graduating cohort at Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep (Ag Prep) is part of a series of short reports which include an overview of Ag Prep, a look at its student support system, a review of its partnerships with schools and colleges, and four briefs on work-based learning, focusing on skills mapping, job shadowing, interdisciplinary projects, and internships. All are available at www.wonderfuleducation.org.



Patrick Wade

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College Graduates. It's May 2018, and the largest graduating class in the history of Bakersfield College is filing into Memorial Stadium. It's a mild evening when they take their seats, and the flat-blue sky will soon give way to bands of yellow, orange, and red.

College President Sonya Christian asks a group of 32 women and men to stand. These students look younger than their peers. They're sporting a white stole, or sash, over their shoulders, to honor their achievements as students of Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep (Ag Prep).

The applause from the other college graduates begins slowly—and then it's resounding. These are high school students, after all. Teenagers. Most are the first in their family to attend college. Most are from low-income families. Many of their parents work in the fields. These students have not received their high school diploma yet, and they're about to be awarded an associate of science degree for transfer (AS-T) in Agriculture Business from Bakersfield College.

The story of how these teenagers earned a college degree before graduating from high school reaches beyond the City of Bakersfield. It includes 22 students who graduated from Reedley College, near Fresno,

and 36 students graduating from West Hills College, in Coalinga. It's a tale of students at three high schools in California's Central Valley who took a leap of faith in 2014-15, when they enrolled as freshmen in a brand-new high school program called Ag Prep. In the four intervening years, these students took advantage of everything that Ag Prep offered.

“Ag Prep was really hard—taking the classes, staying up late to study, doing extracurricular activities. So, when you hear that gasp from the other college graduates [at commencement] and the cheering from our parents from the stands. And then having us rise up and everyone is looking at us, it's just, you know, like, wow! It was worth it.”

— Ag Prep alum

For many Ag Prep students at college commencement, their accomplishment did not sink in when they heard the cheers of college classmates, or at the end of the ceremony, as they were congratulated as college graduates and alumni—an experience they described later as “surreal” and “unforgettable.” Their achievement hit home only afterwards, on the stadium turf, when they were surrounded by their families. According to an alum from Sanger High School, **“It was only then, at the graduation, that I realized what I accomplished. Seeing the look on my parents’ faces made it worthwhile.”**

“I have two sisters, two younger sisters,” said an alum from Wonderful College Prep Academy, in Delano.

“I’m a first-generation [college student], so I want to set the bar as high as possible and let my sisters know the sky’s the limit. I want to leave that legacy to them, and let them know that they can do whatever they set their mind to do.”

This brief tells the story of Ag Prep through snapshots of three graduates, one from each of the founding high school programs; a summary of Ag Prep’s early outcomes based on its first graduating cohort; and a description of the program’s growth and next steps, as its partners build on their successes in supporting Ag Prep students and alumni.

What is Ag Prep?

Ag Prep is a cutting-edge regional education partnership in the San Joaquin Valley designed, led and managed by The Wonderful Company, a longtime supporter of education, health, and wellness in the Valley. The partnership grew out of a need to prepare more youth in the Valley for college and careers, and thereby strengthen communities and workforce development. Agriculture has become a high-tech industry with careers from science and engineering to business administration, and there’s a lack of skilled young workers who are qualified for them. The Wonderful Company brought together seven public high schools, six public middle schools, three community colleges, four state universities, its many brands, and other agricultural companies to create fundamental changes in how students experience school, so that more high school students are engaged in a rigorous, relevant curriculum that gives them direct experience in college classes, Ag careers, and work-based learning.





Up Close with Todd Miller

May 2018 Associate of Science Degree for Transfer (AS-T), Ag Business, **Bakersfield College**

June 2018 High School Diploma, **Wonderful College Prep Academy**, Delano, California

Winter 2019 Enrolled at the **University of California, Merced**

For Todd Miller, school is more than a site of learning. For the past four years, Todd's high school, Wonderful College Prep Academy—and the Ag Prep program he is in—have been beacons in stormy times. They have been places of stability and relief, and springboards to his future. Todd's mother moved out of state when he was nine years old, taking Todd's sister and brother with her. Todd stayed in California with his father, who provided emotional support and tried to make ends meet, but he had medical issues and eventually had to stop working altogether.

"I lived all over California," Todd told me the summer after he graduated from high school. "I moved 15 or more times while I was in school. It was the most

hectic process in the world, but honestly it doesn't matter. A house for me doesn't define 'home.'" He looked at three fellow alumni from the Wonderful Academy. "A home for me is the people around me, because they make the atmosphere joyful."

Todd is humble that way, telling you about his challenges because you asked, and then making light of them, as if anyone could have done what he has done. He is a tall young man, African American, with a calm eagerness that is appealing. Even when he talks about serious topics, somehow his classmates end up sharing a laugh with him.

"I live out on County Line Road and I used to look at the orchards and wonder, 'What do you need all these trees for?' I took a soil science class and an agriculture business class and we stopped by [to see] the irrigation system and micro sprinklers. I realized how much it takes to run just one acre of trees."

— Todd Miller

It was only later that Todd told me he'd been homeless. "It hit us hard, really hard," he said. "At one point I had to figure out where to go. Sometimes I'd go to school all day, and some teachers would be, 'Todd, you're at school on time,' and I'm like, 'For all the wrong reasons.'" He described bleak moments, times when he broke out in tears of frustration. "Sometimes it's good to cry," he said. "It's not something you do every day, but when you do, you feel, like, sometimes I get on my knees, and I pray, 'I need help.'"

Todd credited his Ag Prep coordinator, Angelica Rios, as well as other staff and teachers, his peers, and his father with helping him not only survive but learn how to thrive. One of the most important aspects of Ag Prep, he said, was the fact that staff and teachers set high bars for him, believed in him, and helped him reach them. "This was the best choice I ever made. Right now I'm taking, at Bakersfield College, Stats and English B1B. Those are the last two classes I

need so that I can get my degree; my actual one." Ag Prep students participate in college commencement in May but must complete two college classes the summer after their senior year to complete the full requirements for their degree program.

Ag Prep's hands-on and work-based learning activities helped Todd stay interested in school, he said. And his experiences with The Wonderful Company, in his job shadows and paid internship, helped him understand the diversity of job experiences in agriculture, from plant science to mechanical engineering, which is one of his interests.

Todd made it clear, however, that Ag Prep's academic requirements were not easy. "The tough situation with me was when I was taking chemistry and I was playing basketball. At that time I thought basketball was more important than school, but I learned my priorities." He described a process of having to take college chemistry a second time, let go of his dream to be in the NBA, and choose instead to study during the week and play basketball on the weekends. "I learned what's more important, what's the top thing I need to focus on."

His diligence paid off. Todd had his pick of several universities the spring before graduating, and he chose one close to "home": UC Merced. He plans to major in mechanical engineering, and he said that Ag Prep's staff and teachers taught him to aim high: "They told me, 'Todd's going to have his PhD,' and then, soon enough, I'm thinking, 'You know, maybe I can, if they think I can. I came this far, why not?'" He grinned. "It would be nice to be Dr. Miller."

But the reason Todd made that tough decision, to prioritize schoolwork over sports? He began talking about his sister and little brother living with his mother in Arizona. "I'm doing this for them," he said. "I'm basically my brother's father figure... We've been down so long. You know what? The struggle's over. This is our break, we finally have a break." He described a house that he'd seen recently. "I want to own a house like that one day," he said. "I want my whole family to live in one house."

Ag Prep's Promise to Students

Back in the spring of 2014, Ag Prep was little more than a bold plan and a budding partnership among a few high schools, community colleges, and The Wonderful Company and its many brands. The basic idea was conceived by Wonderful Education, to make high school much more **rigorous** and **relevant** for students—and thereby prepare more students for college and careers. The Wonderful Company's orchards and processing facilities are based in the Valley, and the company is one of the largest agricultural businesses in the world.

Ag Prep was designed from the start as a highly structured experience that raises the bar for students academically, while grounding learning through hands-on, work-based experiences.

- Incoming high school students join a cohort of peers and work independently and together to complete one of three Ag-themed pathways: Ag Business, Ag Mechanics, or Plant Science.
- Each pathway includes a college-prep curriculum (the a-g sequence required at UC and CSU) and a sequence of 60 college credits in high school, which enables students to earn an associate of science degree the summer after graduation (free of charge).
- Students obtain career experience and professional and technical skills through a sequence of project-based activities in school and professional conferences, job shadowing, mock interviews, and a paid internship off-campus.



- Students attend summer school every year, to fit in the college schedule. A range of tutoring, supports, and interventions before, during, and after class helps students catch up and excel academically.

“Before this program I was never really a good student. I didn’t like school. This program opened my eyes and let me see what college is like. It led me to make good decisions in life and want to go to college.”

— Ag Prep alum

Ag Prep graduates can transfer to a university (with half their college credits completed) or they can go straight into a work fellowship in the Ag industry (with a salary of \$35,000), guaranteed by The Wonderful Company for at least one year.

All of that *sounds* wonderful—but the challenges for students are considerable. Incoming Ag Prep students typically begin the ninth grade two or three years behind academically—at the sixth or seventh grade level in English and math. In volunteering to join Ag Prep, they and their parents must commit to the program’s rigorous requirements.

“At first, I didn’t want to be in Ag Prep because they said agriculture and, like, basically my parents work in the fields for a living, I didn’t want to do that. But this opened my eyes. Agriculture is much more than what people think.”

— Ag Prep alum

So why, back in the spring of 2014, did about 60 rising ninth graders at each of Ag Prep’s founding high schools—Avenal High School, Wonderful College Prep Academy, and Sanger High School—take a risk and join this fledgling program? I’ve asked that question for four years, as I’ve gotten to know this first cohort of impressive Ag Prep students.

Were the students drawn to work-based learning?

In describing why they chose Ag Prep, none of the students talked about the structure of the program. At the time, they hadn’t experienced high school, or college. They didn’t know what hands-on, project-based learning was. During high school, however, many described these components as their favorite aspects of Ag Prep.

Were they considering the Ag industry as a career?

A few students described a long-term interest in agriculture. Most, however, emphasized that they were not interested in the industry before they joined Ag Prep. This, too, changed for them in high school. As they worked in teams to study and solve problems in business, health, science, and technology, and as they interacted with Ag professionals through their job shadowing and internship, they saw firsthand the scope and diversity of careers in an industry that was all around them in the Valley.

Do eighth graders care much about college and careers?

In the San Joaquin Valley, they do. Alumni from this cohort will readily admit that as eighth graders they were “lost” or “chilling.” When they joined Ag Prep, they did not fully understand what they were getting into; none of their older friends had been through such a program. But they will also tell you that they understood from the beginning that Ag Prep would give them **a head start on college** (reducing the financial burdens on their parents) and **a leg up on their careers**. To reach their goals for college and a well-paying career, they were willing to work hard, sacrifice their summers, and dedicate afternoons and evenings to learning.

As alumni, how do they now describe their Ag Prep experience? “Incredible.” “Phenomenal.” “Unforgettable.” “A blessing.” “I’m speechless.”

“They made a presentation to us, that we were going to have a [college] degree, like right out of high school. That interested me and I knew it was a great opportunity.”

— Ag Prep alum



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Early Outcomes: Ag Prep's First Cohort

At this early stage, with Ag Prep's first cohort having graduated, how well has Ag Prep fulfilled its promise to students? The outcomes are striking.

Ag Prep's Full Freshman Cohort. Ag Prep students begin taking a college course each semester during freshman year, and their college load doubles or triples during junior and senior years. By the end of 10th grade, those who are missing more than two college classes or a-g college-prep classes are withdrawn from the program so that the rigorous college requirements do not prevent them from graduating from high school on time, or otherwise diminish their chances of getting into a four-year college. Their participation in Ag Prep during their first two years, however, appears to improve their college readiness. Based on all 197 freshmen who joined Ag Prep in fall 2014:

91% graduated from high school within four years.

For comparison, the graduation rates for Fresno, Kern, and Kings counties (where Ag Prep is located) are 81%, 85%, and 83%, respectively (CDE 2018b).

81% graduated with all a-g courses required for admission to UC or CSU.

The share of graduates completing this course sequence for Fresno, Kern, and Kings counties are 44%, 35%, and 34%, respectively (CDE 2018a).

81% graduated with at least 9 units of college credits.

Two-thirds (66%) graduated with at least **one year of college credits**. In California, only 8% of community college students begin taking any college courses in high school. Students who earn college credits in high school are **much more likely to earn college degrees** (Fink et al. 2017). In the Central Valley, very few high schools offered dual enrollment courses when Ag Prep was founded.

*“Going to Wonderful was the best choice I ever made.
I’m in a college class with people that are 22, 23 years old, and I’m only 18.”*

— Ag Prep alum

Ag Prep’s Graduating Class. Of the 197 freshmen who joined Ag Prep in fall 2014, 124 graduated from Ag Prep in June 2018. These graduates completed the a-g sequence of college prep courses for UC and CSU, and Ag Prep’s work-based learning sequence, including a paid internship. Almost all graduates completed the full high school and college course sequence required by one of Ag Prep’s pathways. Of the 124 Ag Prep graduates:

73% earned an associate of science degree the summer after high school graduation. Very few high schools—in California or nationally—offer early college programs that include an associate degree.

80% enrolled in a four-year university in 2018-19, and most entered as juniors. In Fresno, Kern, and Kings counties, less than 20% of graduates enroll in a public four-year university right after high school (PPIC 2018).

- 76 are enrolled at a CSU campus, 21 at UC, and 2 at private nonprofit universities.
- 53 are planning to major in agriculture or an Ag-related field.

2 Ag Prep graduates were **awarded a full-time work fellowship** at The Wonderful Company, with a salary of \$35,000, guaranteed for at least one year.

“The success of the first Ag Prep cohort is proof that when you pair a great academic program with lots of useful work exposure, students become more motivated and serious about their future. If everyone in the Central Valley had the opportunity to experience high school the way they did, imagine the possibilities.”

— **Stewart Resnick**,
Chairman, President, and Co-owner,
The Wonderful Company





Up Close with Andrea Beltran

May 2018 Associate of Science Degree for Transfer (AS-T), Plant Science, **West Hills College**

June 2018 High School Diploma, Salutatorian, **Avenal High School**, Avenal, California

Fall 2018 Enrolled as a sophomore at the **University of California, Davis**

When Andrea Beltran was in the eighth grade, she and her parents heard about a new program, called Ag Prep, that was coming to their high school the next year. The Beltrons were intrigued by the program, but what interested them most was a promise of two years of college credits, including an associate of science degree free of charge, by the time Andrea graduated from high school.

Andrea's parents know firsthand the importance of college education for their children. Both of them work in the fields and neither has finished high school. "My parents always pushed college," Andrea told me a few weeks after her high school graduation. "Always. If they'd had the opportunity to stay in school and go to college themselves, I'm sure they would have."

Andrea described herself as “an average student” back when she was in middle school, though she got mostly A’s. Before joining Ag Prep, she said, she used to procrastinate a lot: “I would do everything at the last minute, on the last day.” She was also very shy, and she avoided talking to groups of people: “That was one of my biggest challenges. I was very bad at communication. I had stage fright.”

“I’m still in shock. I can’t believe I graduated. I never imagined that I would graduate from college before high school.”

— **Andrea Beltran**

From day one, Ag Prep’s sequence of college courses was much more demanding than anything Andrea had ever faced. In the summer before freshman year, she took her first college class: a college-success course that taught her skills in time management, studying, test preparation, and academic and career planning.

Also that summer, she was engaged immediately in a hands-on interdisciplinary project with a team of peers. In English class, she and her team researched and wrote about water conservation. In math, they estimated rates of rainfall, irrigation, and household water uses. In a computer class, they tracked, analyzed, and presented their findings through spreadsheet, text, and presentation applications. In presenting her findings to the class, Andrea was petrified. But she got through it.

The mix of academic knowledge and work-based learning would repeat itself in increasingly complex ways throughout her high school career, immersing her in projects in which she worked with peers to understand real-world problems in plant science, experimented with practical solutions, and presented results—to her classmates during the first year, and then to larger and more diverse audiences. For example, at the end of her paid internship with

The Wonderful Company, she presented the results of her work to an audience that included her supervisor, adult colleagues, and peers.

Andrea credits the high expectations of Ag Prep—and the support of her teachers at Avenal High School—with helping her improve her time management skills. “I learned to be more on top of things,” she said. As a sophomore, she was able to take on extracurricular activities and became a point guard on the basketball team. In junior year, she joined track and field as well, specializing in relays and the 100 meter dash.

She said she’s excited about attending UC Davis, where she entered as a sophomore and is planning a double major in Chicano Studies and Human Development. “I’ve always wanted to help people,” she said.

At her high school commencement, the young woman who began Ag Prep terrified by speaking to a classroom of peers stood on the stage as class salutatorian. She delivered an address to her entire community. “My mom always smiles,” she said afterwards. “My dad is old school, very strict. That’s just the tough life.” On the day of her graduation, she said, her father was “giggling and smiling. It was really nice to see that they are proud of me.”



A Proof Point for Ag Prep

Ag Prep was borne of high expectations—for students and itself. All year long, Ag Prep’s partners share successes and challenges, discuss outcomes, and plan ways to meet student needs more effectively. This process, from ongoing case management to check-ins on program goals, builds capacity for and stimulates program improvement. So it is natural, with Ag Prep’s first cohort of alumni matriculating at universities or entering the workforce, that Wonderful Education would consider this moment as a proof point for Ag Prep itself—an opportunity to check in with partners and examine Ag Prep’s early impacts.

“Our first Ag Prep graduating class are the pioneers of a new way to look at high school and college education. They are living, breathing inspirations of what’s possible when smart kids are given a fair and equal opportunity.”

— **Lynda Resnick**

Vice Chair and Co-owner,
The Wonderful Company



Building on Program Success

Ag Prep’s early results—for its first graduates and other students at all seven participating high schools—suggest that this model can produce extraordinary outcomes for students. Ag Prep’s combination of work-based learning, college course taking, and intensive supports can help students:

- connect their schoolwork to real-world problems and solutions,
- succeed in college courses,
- gain important technical and professional career skills,
- excel in a professional workplace,
- earn an associate degree while in high school, and
- achieve outstanding college-going rates to universities.

Ag Prep also appears to be helping students exceed the expectations of others. As Superintendent David East of Reef-Sunset Unified School District said, “At the beginning, a common narrative was, ‘These kids can’t do college-level work.’ Well, we don’t hear that anymore, because these students are succeeding in college.”

Growth. Evidence of Ag Prep’s success can also be traced to its growth and sustainability. The program has expanded to six middle schools, seven high schools, three community colleges, five universities, and several agricultural companies in the Valley (see Ag Prep Partners, 2018). Based on current plans, the program will reach capacity in 2020, serving about 1,440 high school students.

In terms of sustainability, Ag Prep is funded on a shared cost model, with high schools, community colleges, and The Wonderful Company investing roughly a third each for the program, per high school program. Substantial grant support from the California Career Pathways Trust helped to defray start-up and expansion costs. When that state support ended, each of the schools doubled down on their own investments, as did Wonderful, to continue offering Ag Prep to students.

AG PREP PARTNERS, 2018

Agricultural Companies

The Wonderful Company and its brands:
 Wonderful Halos, Wonderful Orchards,
 Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds, and
 POM Wonderful
 AgriLand Farming Company
 Fowler Packing
 Fresno County Farm Bureau
 Kearney Agricultural Research and
 Extension Center
 Olam
 Western Agricultural Processors Association

Middle Schools

American Union Elementary School
 Mendota Junior High School
 Reef-Sunset Middle School
 Thomas Jefferson Middle School
 West Fresno Middle School
 Wonderful College Prep Academy (Delano)

High Schools

Avenal High School
 Mendota High School
 Reedley Middle College High School
 Sanger High School
 Wasco Union High School
 Washington Union High School
 Wonderful College Prep Academy (Delano)

Community Colleges

Bakersfield College
 Reedley College
 West Hills College

Universities

CSU Bakersfield
 Fresno State University
 UC Davis
 Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
 Cal Poly Pomona

Impacts and Expansion. Ag Prep’s approach is also spreading among school and college partners, as they borrow from program learnings to improve outcomes for all students. When Ag Prep began, five of its seven high schools did not offer any college courses; now all seven not only offer an associate degree, but also have expanded their college courses to students outside of Ag Prep. Wonderful College Prep Academy, for example, changed its graduation requirements so that every graduate must now earn at least one year of college credits. At Avenal High School, Stephanie Bolweg, the school’s Ag Prep coordinator, reports that graduation rates at the high school have jumped, attendance is up, and suspensions are down:

- **College for All.** Avenal changed its master schedule, so that all students can now enroll in college classes. The school is now partnering with West Hills College to offer college classes during the school day, as part of students’ regular schedule.
- **A-g for All.** Prior to Ag Prep, Avenal did not offer the full a-g course sequence required for admission at UC and CSU. Now every Avenal High School student is required to enroll in all of those courses. In four years, the campus has increased the share of its students completing the a-g course sequence from 0% to 37% (CDE 2019).
- **More Career Pathways.** Drawing from its experiences with The Wonderful Company, Avenal has created two additional career pathways that integrate college courses and technical training into the high school schedule: the Waste Management Environmental Science Academy (WMESA) and the Health and Medical Occupations Academy (HMOA).

“We just got our graduation data, and we had the highest graduation rate in Kings County, higher than the state average. We did that while increasing our graduation requirements. Ag Prep is a key leverage point for all of that.”

— **David East,**
 Superintendent, Reef-Sunset Unified School District

At the college level, the Ag Prep model also appears to be spreading. According to Bakersfield College President Sonya Christian, working with Ag Prep has led to a “culture shift” in which college administrators and faculty are better prepared to understand the needs of this generation of students.

- **Working with High Schools.** Bakersfield used to see outreach as an opportunity to enroll high school students in existing courses and programs, Christian said. Now the college works with high schools in a more structured way, to develop a sequence of courses in a pathway or several pathways that meet the needs of high school students. College staff meet with groups of students at their high school to do prescreening and develop their education plans. “That intentionality and structure,” Christian said, “was influenced by our experiences with Ag Prep.”

- **Faculty Engagement.** For faculty familiar with teaching at the college, driving to Delano and teaching college classes at a high school was a major change. “But they came back,” Christian said, “and gave presentations about how bright and capable these students are, and how they can meet the learning outcomes. That’s faculty talking to other faculty to build an understanding, and it has shifted the outlook of our departments.”

“We’ve leveraged the knowledge of POM Wonderful about what a pathway actually entails. We’ve expanded our pathways to include engineering, education, digital media, and health. And we’ve connected our pathways to more dual-credit [college] courses.”

— **Matthew Navo**

Former Superintendent,
Sanger Unified School District

- **Working with Industry.** Ag Prep also helped provide the college with a clear model for how to engage with industry, according to Christian. This includes the structuring of industry roles in helping to provide

work-based learning, through job shadowing, summer camps, and internships. The college has already transferred this approach to other fields, including industrial automation and music.



Student Persistence. Even as cohorts of Ag Prep students are making outstanding gains, challenges remain in helping every student thrive academically. Ninth graders enter Ag Prep two or three years behind grade level in English and math, and Ag Prep provides a series of supports to help them catch up and excel in high school and college courses. The supports vary because each school has its own structure for providing interventions during and outside of class, but a central element features an all-embracing case management system in which the Ag Prep coordinator engages with students as motivator, mentor, and success coach. The coordinator reviews students’ records daily and meets with teachers to identify those who are struggling in their classes. At one school, for example, the coordinator works with a leadership team—the Ag Prep counselor, math intervention teacher, and English intervention teacher—to determine which team member is in the best position to coach and mentor each struggling student. That team member works one-on-one with the student to set goals and an action plan for personalized tutoring and support, and meets with the student to track performance on weekly objectives.

Each school worked several years to develop and refine its own version of this proactive and individualized system. Given the academic challenges that students face, Ag Prep’s number-one focus currently is to continue to increase student success so that students stay on track to complete all of their college-prep and college courses—with the goal to achieve a program completion rate of 75% within the next two years.

Bachelor's Degrees and Workforce Development

Among Ag Prep's first graduating cohort who earned an associate degree, 98% (88 of 90) chose to pursue a bachelor's degree right after high school. The Wonderful Company awarded all of these students with a college scholarship of \$4,000 to \$6,000 annually (depending on the university they chose), to help cover fees and other costs. According to Sandra Caldwell, former president of Reedley College, "That's a huge success, unparalleled, the high number of students enrolling in universities. Ag Prep has shown these students and families the power of education, that a bachelor's degree is attainable for them, and that they deserve their place at a university campus. This is how you create generational change."

"My parents weren't so strong about me going to college due to the financial situation. But this program really opened their eyes to see that with education all things are possible."

— Ag Prep alum

As Ag Prep's incoming class progressed to graduation, Wonderful Education expanded its university partnerships and developed collaborative systems to support its Ag Prep scholars at their universities. For example, Wonderful Education took the following steps:

- **Partnerships.** Wonderful partnered with CSU Bakersfield, Fresno State University, Cal Poly Pomona, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and UC Davis to ensure a smooth transition and supports for Ag Prep students, including making sure that all college credits earned in high school transfer to the university.
- **Case Manager.** Fifty-one Ag Prep alumni enrolled at Fresno State University in fall 2018. The Wonderful Company and the university are splitting the costs of a case manager at Fresno State dedicated to supporting these students.
- **College Success Specialist.** Every Ag Prep scholar is assigned a college specialist who provides weekly support through the first year of college and then ongoing support until they earn their degree.



“What’s impressed me most about Ag Prep is the quality, hard work, and maturity level of the students. These kids are engaged and committed. They’re just the kind of dedicated people we’re looking for to be a part of our team.”

— David Krause

President, Wonderful Citrus

Wonderful Education is also developing new programs to keep Ag Prep alumni connected with workforce opportunities in the San Joaquin Valley, including at The Wonderful Company and its many brands:

- **Postsecondary Internship.** Many Ag Prep graduates are enrolling in universities as juniors, so they will have only one summer during college; the following summer they will be seeking their first post-college job. For Ag Prep alumni who are pursuing a bachelor’s degree in agriculture and are in good standing at their university, The Wonderful Company plans to offer them a paid job internship during the summer after their junior year.

- **Alumni Career Specialist.** Wonderful Education is hiring a position to support career and work-based learning opportunities for Ag Prep alumni in the field of agriculture, from the day they graduate from Ag Prep, through their university experience, and into the workforce.

- **Job Placement and Career Fair.** Wonderful Education is also developing plans for job placement and a career fair for Ag Prep alumni at four-year universities, during their senior year. The event offers an opportunity for The Wonderful Company and its brands to recruit Ag Prep alumni as they transition into the workforce.

As alumni earn four-year degrees and enter the workforce, Ag Prep anticipates more than 25% will pursue careers in agriculture. By supporting students to and through postsecondary programs that lead to good jobs, Ag Prep serves as an engine of economic mobility for communities in the Valley, and as a gateway of opportunity to the field of agriculture.



“I see myself graduating from the university, and I think I may be coming back here because we’ve had a lot of support from different people. I feel that the only way to pay it back is to give back.”

— Ag Prep alum



Up Close with Ernesto Lara

May 2018 Associate of Science Degree (AS),
Ag Mechanics, **Reedley College**

June 2018 High School Diploma,
Sanger High School, Sanger,
California

Fall 2018 Began Wonderful Work
Fellowship at **POM Wonderful**,
Del Rey, California

Ernesto Lara is a thinker. A planner. A practical guy. When I asked him what it felt like to graduate from high school and from college within a month of each other, he told me a story about a truck he bought for \$200, a 1974 Ford Ranchero GT. “It had an engine and transmission but it wouldn’t fire,” he said. “The fuel system was a mess.”

The truck had been sitting for 25 years, and old gasoline had rotted the lines. He spent a month taking the fuel system apart, from the tank to the carburetor, cleaning some parts and replacing others, spending

\$700 that he didn't have. After you do that kind of work, he said, taking an engine apart and putting it back together, a lot of times you turn the key, and it's all for nothing. It doesn't start.

So after he'd rebuilt his Rancho GT, Ernesto sat in the driver's seat, gripped the steering wheel, and tried not to get too worked up. He inserted the key in the ignition and paused. "It started on the first crank," he said, smiling. "I was in disbelief, and then there was an immense sense of pride from hearing the engine run, because I knew I did that myself. That's what graduation felt like, the same sort of feeling. All my immediate family members were there."

Ernesto is the youngest of four and lives with his parents on a ranch near Sanger. Every day he feeds, waters, and takes care of steer, cows, horses, and chickens. He likes the animals, but not the chores. Yet he doesn't take any of it for granted. "Working on the ranch has taught me to have a work ethic," he said. "Both my parents give 100% and don't complain. They do it because they know it's for the best."

"My mom cooks the best pork tamales and posole. It tastes like home. My dad works on cars and various vehicles. I grew up working with him on his trucks."

— Ernesto Lara

His mother works around the house, his father, in citrus fields. College wasn't an option for either of them when they were younger. "So they made it known to all of us that education is the way to get ahead in life, to do better, and to provide for your family," Ernesto explained. One of his older sisters is enrolled at Fresno State. His brother is at Fresno City College.

As an Ag Prep grad, Ernesto has an associate of science degree in Ag Mechanics. He's one of two Ag Prep alumni who decided to pass up a college scholarship and to accept instead a one-year paid fellowship with The Wonderful Company. He will be working at POM Wonderful, in Del Rey, where he'll rotate through a range of job roles and receive an annual salary of about \$35,000. His decision to accept the fellowship was not difficult, he said, though he weighed his options and spoke with his parents and high school and college advisors. He wants the hands-on experience. And he knows what he's getting into, since he worked with the maintenance crew at POM Wonderful for his internship at Ag Prep.

"Most high school grads are anxious about the future, because they're not sure what it holds for them," he said. "For me? I've been in this program for four years, I've done an internship and job shadowing. I've seen what Ag Mechanics is like in a professional setting. I know that. I'm ready for it. I can't wait."

Even so, Ernesto's career plans extend well beyond the fellowship. Within five years, he plans to attend Fresno State and earn a bachelor's degree in Ag Business. With his combined mechanical and business skills, he hopes to land a supervisory position in agriculture. "I see myself in the Central Valley," he said. "It's a nice place to settle down."

But he's not ready to settle down yet. Nor does he expect things to be easy. "At the ranch," he said, "you can't expect anything to go right the first time. That's one of the things I've learned, and it helped in school. It takes a will to succeed, a determination. Even after being deterred, I come back until I get it."



Resources

CDE (California Department of Education). 2018a. 12th grade graduates completing all courses required for UC and/or CSU entrance (with county data), all students, State of California 2016-17. DataQuest. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>.

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Fink, J., Jenkins, D., and Yanaguira, T. 2017. *What happens to students who take community college “dual enrollment” courses in high school?* Community College Research Center. September. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-happens-community-college-dual-enrollment-students.html>.

PPIC (Public Policy Institute of California). 2018. Maps of college enrollment rates in California’s counties. Based on data from the California Department of Education and the California Postsecondary Education Commission. <http://www.ppic.org/data-set/maps-of-college-enrollment-rates-in-californias-counties/>.

Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future works to ensure economic opportunity for all. Our innovative college and career pathway models give those struggling to succeed access to needed knowledge, skills, and credentials. We partner with education, workforce, and business leaders to understand the labor market and design systems to sustain a pipeline of skilled workers. We advocate with policymakers for state and federal policies to support this work.

The Wonderful Company

The Wonderful Company is a privately held \$4 billion international company that offers healthy, iconic brands for healthy lifestyles. Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds is the largest vertically integrated pistachio and almond grower and processor in the world. Wonderful Citrus is the largest integrated grower, packer and shipper of fresh citrus in the U.S. These operations, which are located in California's Central Valley, are also affiliated with the worldwide leader in fresh California pomegranates and various pomegranate-based products. The Wonderful Company's products can be found in the produce aisles of grocery stores nationwide under popular retail brands, including Wonderful Pistachios, Wonderful Almonds, Wonderful Halos and POM Wonderful. For more information, go to www.wonderful.com.

Wonderful Education Programs

Wonderful Education is an innovative educational program that is driving positive change in California's Central Valley. As a philanthropic extension of The Wonderful Company, Wonderful Education funds a host of college and career readiness programs to promote opportunities for young people in California's Central Valley. Wonderful Education initiatives include college and career readiness, college scholarships, school grants, summer school programs, arts education, early childhood programs, teacher development and parent engagement. Wonderful Education coordinates directly with The Wonderful Company to offer a sequence of rich work-based learning experiences for all Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep students, including paid internships.



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