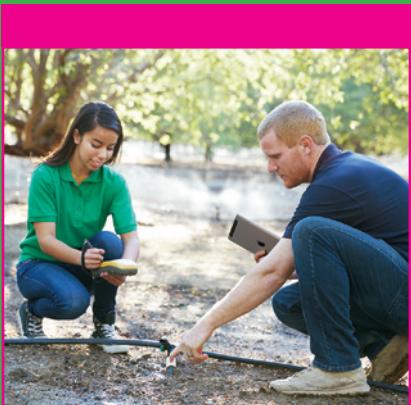


# College and Career Success in the Central Valley



How Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep (Ag Prep) is  
Changing the Educational Experience for Students



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# **College and Career Success**

## **in the Central Valley**

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Changing the Educational Experience for Students

Thad Nodine

Spring 2015



Tucked away in California's Central Valley, among golden hills and green orchards, are the towns and cities where families lay down roots. Like other communities across America, these are towns where parents volunteer in schools, churches, and county fairs. Families attend harvest festivals and soccer games. Children dream of becoming firefighters, astronauts, farmers, teachers, and scientists.

Household income in the San Joaquin Valley is below the state average. Poverty rates are higher. But employment is on an upswing and most of the jobs are in agriculture. In McFarland, a welcome sign beckons: "The Heartbeat of Agriculture." A few miles north, a larger sign greets motorists near Delano:



The vacancies are in career positions with high starting salaries that can support a family. They represent only a few of the many openings at The Wonderful Company. Yet despite these job openings, communities throughout the Valley are experiencing double-digit unemployment. The jobless rate among teens in Kern, Kings, and Fresno counties hovers around 37%. Many young people have to leave the Valley to seek employment.

**It's called the skills gap**—the mismatch between the many good jobs available and the lack of skilled young workers who are qualified for them. Agriculture has become a high-tech industry with careers from science and engineering to business administration, but education in the Valley has not caught up.

**The challenge?** Not enough youth in the Valley are being prepared for college and careers.

## The Ag Prep Promise

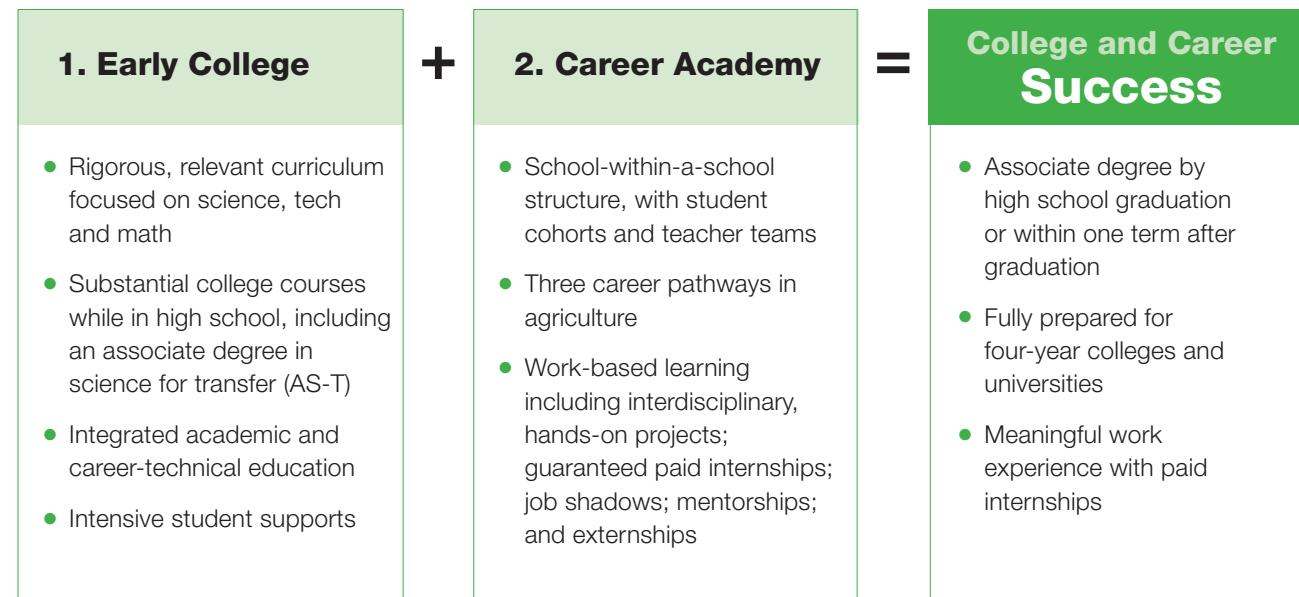
Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep (Ag Prep) is a regional partnership that increases college and career success among youth in the lower San Joaquin Valley, from Bakersfield to Fresno. The partnership brings together high schools, community colleges, agriculture production and processing companies, and Wonderful Education, which provides planning and management support. Currently, Ag Prep is targeting four communities: Avenal, Delano, McFarland, and Sanger.

**The Vision:** To prepare youth in the San Joaquin Valley for college and career success—and advance tomorrow's agricultural, business, science, and technology leaders.

**The Work:** To create a fundamental change in the educational experience, so that more high school students are engaged in a rigorous, relevant curriculum that gives them direct experience in college classes, agricultural careers, and work-based learning.

**The Model:** Ag Prep combines (1) an "early college" model that provides a rigorous academic program of study with substantial college credits while in high school; and (2) a career academy with three agriculture-themed pathways—including work-based learning opportunities—that lead directly to well-paying, mid-level career positions in agriculture.

## The Ag Prep Model:



## The Pathway Programs

High school partners provide community colleges with classrooms, facilities, teachers, access to students, and student supports. Community college partners provide certificate and degree programs, college credits, oversight, instructors, and student supports. The Wonderful Company and other agricultural companies provide guidance in aligning curriculum with industry standards, collaboration on skills mapping, guest speakers, job shadowing, mentorships, internships, and externships.

HIGH SCHOOLS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	CERTIFICATE OR AA DEGREE
Avenal High School	& West Hills	➤ Plant Science
McFarland High School	& Bakersfield	➤ Agricultural Mechanics
Wonderful College Prep Academy (Delano)	& Bakersfield	➤ Agricultural Business Management
Sanger High School	& Reedley	➤ Plant Science and Agricultural Mechanics



Ag Prep's partners for the 2014–15 school year include four high schools and their school districts (Avenal High School, McFarland High School, Sanger High School, and Wonderful College Prep Academy, a charter school); three community colleges (Bakersfield, Reedley, and West Hills); and six major agricultural companies (POM Wonderful, Wonderful Citrus, Wonderful Orchards, Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds, Grimmway Farms, and Olam International). The program will grow each year as incoming classes enroll. By 2018, at least 200 high school students will be earning their associate degrees or technical certificates in agriculture annually.

The pathway programs feature three fields that are in high demand in the Central Valley, that pay well, and that lead to promising careers: agricultural business management, agricultural mechanics, and plant science.

All partners have committed financially to the Ag Prep model, including substantial resources and facilities by schools and community colleges, and commitments for paid internships from partnering agricultural companies. In addition, Ag Prep receives funding from Lynda and Stewart Resnick (founders of The Wonderful Company), the California Career Pathways Trust (including critical startup costs such as professional development), and other sources.

## Why Ag Prep Came Together

California's \$45 billion agriculture industry has become more high-tech, specialized, and innovative, with job openings that require a higher level of skills and knowledge compared to a decade ago. Meanwhile, the pipeline of college graduates in the Valley is too small, so many entry-level skilled positions remain unfilled. Many mid- and high-level managers are nearing retirement, without enough young prospects to step into leadership positions.

Skills gaps have been reported as a national phenomenon, and the San Joaquin Valley is no exception. In the Valley, the skills gap is caused by several factors, including:

- Schools and colleges are not preparing enough youth for entry-level career positions in agriculture.
- High school dropout rates in the San Joaquin Valley are higher than the state average. College-going rates are lower, especially for four-year degrees. The share of residents with a bachelor's degree is much lower in the Valley (16 percent), compared to the state as a whole (31 percent).
- The agriculture industry has not marketed itself well as a viable choice for innovative, high-tech work.

## Illustrating the Skills Gap, 2014

348

The number of job openings for entry-level, skilled positions annually at The Wonderful Company alone.

100%

The percentage of those jobs that call for a college certificate or degree. About 84% of the job postings ask for a certificate or an associate degree. About 16% prefer a bachelor's degree.

38%

The percentage of openings that remains unfilled annually due to a lack of qualified applicants. Many jobs that are filled go to under-qualified candidates who require substantial training.

1,000

The estimated number of agricultural employers in the region. About one of five jobs in the Valley is provided by agriculture.

Source: Wonderful Education, 2014.

- Most youth are unaware of the wide range of well-paying careers in agriculture. There's a common—yet inaccurate—saying in some circles: "If you don't study in school, you'll end up in agriculture." The truth is that even high school graduates do not qualify for many jobs in today's agriculture industry.
- Many young people seeking college and careers move away from the Valley, not knowing that there are dynamic career opportunities near their hometowns.

*"Farming has changed. Whether you want to contribute to plant research as a scientist, build sustainable food sources for your community, make irrigation more efficient, or specialize in the mechanics of packing plants—that's all agriculture."*

— Carole Goldsmith

President, West Hills College

## The Ag Prep Model

Ag Prep is unique in drawing from several successful approaches to education reform, while also offering guaranteed paid internships in the agriculture industry.

### 1. Early College Curriculum and Supports

Ag Prep integrates college courses and student supports into the high school curriculum—so that all students earn at least 53 college credits while in high school, and many will earn an associate degree in science for transfer (AS-T, 60 credits). All college credits are free of charge and will be transferable to a four-year university, thereby fast-tracking students' college experience and resulting in major savings for families. Ag Prep's early college approach (see sidebar) is designed to increase college success particularly among low-income youth, first-generation college students, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in college. Ag Prep prepares students for college by immersing them in a structured program of college classes and providing them with intensive supports to ensure their success.

At Ag Prep's partnering high schools, the curriculum is aligned with the Common Core and with entry requirements for the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems, so that all graduates are fully prepared for four-year colleges. (The AS-T degree guarantees admission at CSU as a junior.) The curriculum focuses on science, technology, and mathematics—through hands-on projects, work-based learning, and other instructional methods that draw from the experiences and work of the Central Valley. In addition, students earn a specialized certificate in agriculture and/or an associate of science degree, which provides them with job mobility, and increases their chances of pursuing and earning a bachelor's degree.

High school coursework builds toward the college courses, which are taught on high school campuses by partnering community college instructors. High schools provide most of the intensive, wraparound support, including mandatory summer schools, mandatory

## Ag Prep Context: Early College High Schools

Ag Prep goes beyond many early college programs by also infusing career pathways and guaranteed internships into its approach. Over the past decade, more than 280 schools serving over 80,000 students across the U.S. have developed early college programs. Recent outcomes show:

- **High school graduates:** 90% of early college students receive a diploma, compared to 78% of students nationally.
- **College degrees:** 30% of early college students earn an associate degree or a certificate with their diploma, compared to very few students nationally.
- **College credits:** 94% of early college students earn college credits in high school, compared to 10% of students nationally.
- **College enrollment:** 71% of early college graduates enroll in college right after high school, compared to 54% of low-income graduates nationally.
- **College persistence:** 86% of early college graduates who enroll in college stay for their second year, compared to 72% of college students nationally.

Source: M. Webb and C. Gerwin, Early College Expansion (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2014).

*"Coming here and knowing they would pay for college classes—it took a load off my parents."*

— Ag Prep student



interventions, academic tutoring, and dedicated college and career counseling. Partner community colleges select and oversee the college instructors, determine the requirements for certificates and degrees, and ensure the quality of the courses and degree programs—as they would at their own campuses. They also provide tutoring for the college classes, with experienced college students sitting in lectures with Ag Prep students and then helping them with their assignments.

## 2. Career Academy Focused on Agriculture

Ag Prep integrates its early college curriculum with a career-academy approach that has proven effective in increasing student preparation for college and careers (see sidebar). In particular, Ag Prep builds from the California Partnership Academy (CPA), which is structured as a school within a school. Ag Prep creates **small learning communities** of students who are immersed in rigorous high school and college coursework along **career pathways** that lead directly to certificates, degrees, and mid-level career positions in agriculture. In addition, Ag Prep offers a wide range of **work-based learning** opportunities that include paid internships with The Wonderful Company and other agricultural companies.

**Small learning communities.** As a career academy, Ag Prep focuses on a cohort (or small group) of students at each high school who commit to the academy and who share teachers, classes, and other experiences. A team of math, science, English, and career-technical teachers (in agriculture) is assigned

***"This is a game changer for a lot of reasons, particularly The Wonderful Company's commitment for internships and jobs. There's no better way to get kids involved than experience and a paycheck."***

— David East

Superintendent, Reef-Sunset Unified School District

### Ag Prep Context: Career Academies

Ag Prep goes beyond traditional career academies by also infusing early college and other features into its approach. The number of career academies in the U.S. has grown substantially over the past two decades, to about 7,000 academies in 2010, with about one million high school students enrolled. Studies have shown a wide range of benefits associated with career academies, including:

- Better attendance, more credits earned toward graduation, increased grade point averages, and better retention through high school.
- Lower need for remediation in college.
- Higher earnings over eight years after high school.

Source: David Stern et al., *Career Academies: A Proven Strategy to Prepare High School Students for College and Careers* (Berkeley: Career Academy Support Network, UC Berkeley, 2010).

to teach the courses, to meet with each other and with students regularly, and to share decision-making about curriculum and instruction. Partnering community college instructors teach college courses—including classes in general education and agriculture—that are aligned with the high school's early college curriculum and supports.

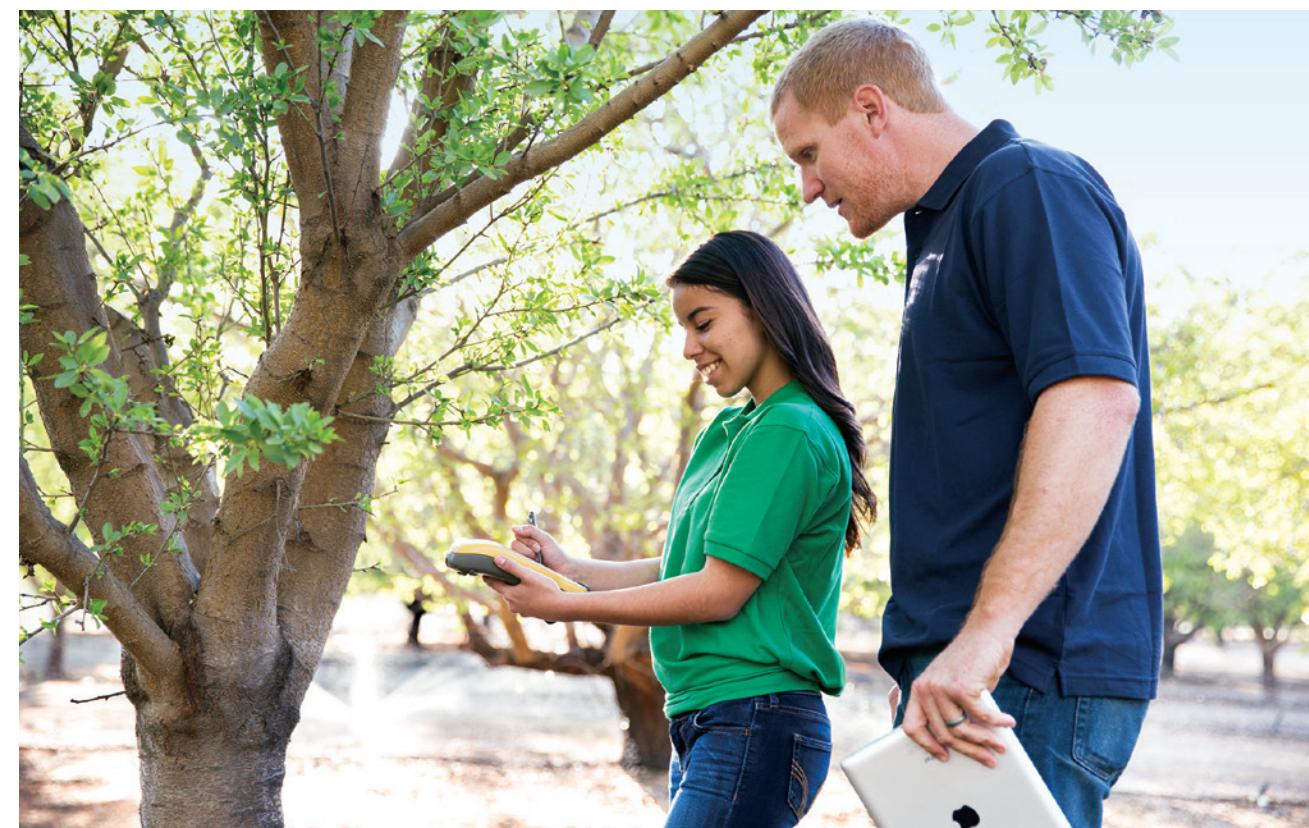
**Career pathways in agriculture.** In integrating high school and college coursework, Ag Prep also immerses students in a rigorous academic program of study within three agriculture-themed pathways. The pathways were selected because they are in demand in the Central Valley, they pay well at the entry level and beyond, and they lead to innovative, promising careers. Students earn an associate degree and/or a technical certificate in agriculture by the time they graduate from high school—free of charge.

The three pathways are:

- **Agricultural business management.** Students apply principles and technical skills in human resources, purchasing, storing, inspecting, marketing, and selling agricultural products. Average annual income: \$75,198 plus benefits.
- **Agricultural mechanics.** Students focus on skills, knowledge, and training needed for equipment repair, machine operators, maintenance (for example, welding and plumbing), and general administration. Average annual income: \$56,907 plus benefits.
- **Plant science.** Students study the theories, principles, and practices involved with the production and management of food and soil conservation, including irrigation and pest management. Average annual income: \$35,350 for technicians, \$69,493 for scientists plus benefits.

*"We got to see the almond production, how they shake the almonds, clean them, and dry them. We got to see how the irrigation process works. We saw how they package the products... It gave us a hands-on opportunity to see what agriculture is all about."*

— Ag Prep student



**Work-based learning.** Ag Prep works closely with high school teachers, college instructors, and agricultural companies to integrate work-based learning skills and opportunities into the high school and college curriculum. This includes hands-on, interdisciplinary projects across math, science, and English courses focusing on agricultural themes. Ag Prep guarantees paid internships to every participating twelfth-grade student who fulfills the program's requirements. The internships are aligned with the student's pathway and build on classroom activities. Ag Prep also provides guest speakers, job shadowing, and mentorships related to the agricultural themes being studied. Instructors are provided with externships, shared planning time, and industry visits to help develop relevant projects that are aligned with learning objectives and instructional strategies.

## The Ag Prep Experience: What Ag Prep Means for Students

In 2014–15, Ag Prep has 232 participants, all of whom are freshmen (see Ag Prep Snapshot). Enrollments will increase with each incoming class over the next few years. The regional collaborative will expand to several additional high schools in 2015–16, as well as to middle schools that serve as feeder schools for the high schools.

Ag Prep is in its inaugural year, but it is already transforming—and ramping up—educational programs for students. The following components illustrate some of the key changes that Ag Prep is bringing to high schools.

### School is Out ~~IN~~ for Summer

At partnering high schools, Ag Prep students participate in mandatory summer sessions prior to each school year—and all the summer sessions feature college courses. In 2014–15, each incoming freshman completed a college success course, for which they earned their first college credit. They entered high school as successful college students.

The four-week summer program in 2014–15 also exposed incoming freshmen to rigorous English and math classes, many of which infused agriculture themes into interdisciplinary projects. At Avenal High School, for example, a summer project focused on water conservation. In English class, students completed research and wrote about themes related to water use

### Academy Participants

Ag Prep targets all students who want to pursue college and career goals while in high school. Participating students volunteer for the academy and, along with their parents, must commit to the program's rigorous requirements, such as summer school, after-school interventions, college course-taking, and leadership activities.

Ag Prep participants reflect the demographics of their high schools. About 82 percent of Ag Prep students receive free or reduced-cost school lunch, 50 percent are English learners, and 92 percent are from minority ethnic or racial groups. Less than a third (31 percent) of incoming Ag Prep freshmen are at grade level in math, and about 40 percent are at grade level in English.

Source: Wonderful Education, 2014.

and conservation. In math, they used statistics and projections to estimate various rates of rainfall, irrigation, and household uses over time. In a computer class, they presented their findings through videos and other formats.

**Summer Camps for Middle School Students.** Ag Prep also works to ramp up expectations and opportunities for younger students in the Valley. For example, Ag Prep provides weeklong overnight camps on college campuses for rising eighth graders in the areas served by Ag Prep's high school partners. At the camps, students

experience college firsthand by staying in dorms for the week and participating in hands-on activities that feature work-based learning. They visit orchards and processing facilities, and talk with field managers and line experts. They witness the power of simulations in surveying and in computer-aided design (CAD). They work with farm machinery and tools, including welding and fabricating. And they see the bigger picture—how the farm operates as a business. From these experiences, they get a firsthand look at a wide range of cutting-edge careers in agriculture. In summer 2014, over 200 rising eighth graders participated in residential camps held by West Hills College, Coalinga; Reedley College; and Bakersfield College.

### Shared Vision and Goals

Ag Prep students have already shared a range of experiences together: summer school, college visits, college classes, and visits to agricultural production plants. They also share the same groups of classes and teams of teachers, which gives them a strong community and support system at their schools. The teachers assigned to the academy meet together to plan instructional strategies and supports. For students, the sense of community also derives from a shared purpose; Ag Prep helps them visualize how each class leads to their college and career goals. "That makes a difference in terms of motivation and engagement," said Juan Ruiz, principal at Avenal High School. "They know how it all fits together."

*"It's true rigor because the students are preparing for college classes much earlier than they traditionally would. We know that our students are college-ready because they're taking and passing college courses."*

— Saúl González  
Executive Director,  
Wonderful College Prep Academy



### Ag Prep Snapshot: Enrollment, 2014–15

HIGH SCHOOL	STUDENTS ENROLLED	MALE	FEMALE
Avenal	58	23	35
McFarland	35	21	14
Wonderful College Prep Academy	63	30	33
Sanger	76	38	38
Total	232	112 (48%)	120 (52%)

Source: Wonderful Education, 2014.

## Academic Rigor and High Expectations

The high school partners have revised their four-year course sequence and have gone well above the school's graduation requirements to make sure all Ag Prep students enroll in, and pass, the a-g course requirements needed for enrollment in the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems. Courses are also being revised to ensure that students are prepared for their college coursework. For example, partnering high schools are requiring Ag Prep students to take integrated agricultural biology as freshmen, a course that covers their biology requirement and provides them with content knowledge in science and agriculture they will need for college courses in their agriculture pathways. Most high schools in California schedule biology classes for sophomore year.

## College Classes

At each high school, incoming Ag Prep students completed their first college class in summer 2014, and are taking two college classes during the 2014–15 school year (one each semester). As sophomores, the students will take at least two college courses during the year, depending on the high school they attend (see table, next page). Juniors and seniors will enroll in at least four college courses each year. Students also earn college credits each summer. The college courses are challenging academically, but the high schools provide substantial supports.

*"The main difference [with the college course] is you have to study on your own... If you really want to understand what she's teaching, you have to read the chapters and take notes on your own."*

— Ag Prep student



## Schedule of College Classes at the High Schools Leading to AS-T Degree, by Career Pathway

Students earn college credits, free of charge, toward an associate degree in science for transfer (AS-T, 60 credits). All participating students are expected to complete the following college courses.

	Wonderful Acad. + Bakersfield CC	Avenal HS + West Hills CC	Sanger HS + Reedley CC		McFarland HS + Bakersfield CC
Grade	Ag Business Management	Plant Science	Plant Science	Ag Mechanics	Ag Mechanics
Summer	Microsoft Office	Ag Applications to Computers	Ag Applications to Computers	Ag Applications to Computers	Microsoft Office
9 <sup>th</sup>	Nutrition Spanish 1	Health Spanish 1	Health Spanish 1	Health Spanish 1	Nutrition Spanish 1
Summer	Art Appreciation	Art Appreciation	Spanish 2	Spanish 2	Art Appreciation
10 <sup>th</sup>	World History Ag Sales and Comm. Ag, Environment, and Society Intro Ag Business	Intro Plant Science Tractor Operation	Plant Nutrition Pesticides	Construction Tech. Welding 1	Mechanized Ag Ag Safety
Summer	Public Speaking	Psychology	Public Speaking	Physical Education	Public Speaking Physical Education
11 <sup>th</sup>	Ag Leadership Intro Plant Science Intro Chemistry U.S. History	California Water Weeds and Plants Communications U.S. History	Plant Science Plant Propagation and Production Art Appreciation U.S. History	Electricity and Hydraulics Small Gas Engines Art Appreciation U.S. History	Ag Leadership Small Gas Engines Welding Processes U.S. History
Summer	American Gov't.	American Gov't.	American Gov't.	American Gov't.	American Gov't.
12 <sup>th</sup>	Ag Internship Ag Economics Macro Economics English Comp. Intro Literature Statistics	Ag Internship Ag Economics Pest Management Critical Thinking Intro Chemistry Statistics	Ag Internship Ag Economics Critical Reasoning General Chemistry Statistics	Ag Internship Ag Economics Welded Structures Machinery Tech. Public Speaking Statistics	Ag Internship Welded Structures Farm Diesel Repair Farm Power Ops. Ag, Environment, and Society Statistics
Post-High School	[No additional credits needed to complete AS-T]	Soils English Comp.	Soils English Comp.	Soils English Comp.	Soils English Comp.

Note: Only college courses are included above; high school classes are not included. High school science classes include ag biology, chemistry, and physics. High school math classes include pre-calculus or calculus.

## Interdisciplinary Projects with Ag Themes

One of Ag Prep's promises is to make education relevant—which can help students achieve the rigor that is required by connecting academic topics to work-related themes. During the summer, Ag Prep teachers from all the high schools met for a weeklong training session, where they worked by subject across high schools—and within high school teams across subjects—to develop interdisciplinary Ag-related themes. The instructional planning continued throughout the semester. At Sanger High School, for example, English teachers have been meeting with Ag and science teachers and integrating the themed learning into the English language arts standards. As the biology teacher covers a unit on ecology, water usage, and conservation, the English teacher is assigning students to write about water rights and the history of irrigation. Meanwhile, the Ag instructor is teaching a related module on crops and pollution. At each of the schools, students create at least one substantial interdisciplinary project each semester.

The joint instructional planning requires schools to create times when Ag Prep teachers can meet with each other regularly, such as common planning periods during school and on short days. It also requires teachers to find time to talk and exchange ideas informally, such as weekly lunch sessions and via email.

## Technology-Infused Instruction

The number-one skill that incoming mid-skilled agricultural employees need, according to executives at The Wonderful Company, is computer aptitude. That's why Ag Prep schools provide each participating student with his or her own laptop, tablet, or other device, and it's why they integrate computer and software use into everyday assignments and projects—to prepare every student for 21st-century learning and workplace environments. Ag Prep students not only submit homework electronically, but also work on drafts and presentations online (through Google Docs, YouTube

*"This project brings everyone together to make sure students walk out in four years prepared for college and with skills that can help them be employed now. They'll know how to adapt and problem-solve. They'll know the language and the math of agriculture, of business. They'll be able to walk onto a job site and know what people are talking about and be able to contribute."*

— Jonathan Delano

Ag Prep Coordinator, Sanger High School

and other platforms), so they can access projects online across multiple classes, and work in teams to edit and supplement each other's work. Students also learn to use software appropriate for their agricultural pathways, such as Global Positioning System (GPS), computer-aided design (CAD), geographic information system (GIS), analytic software, and surveying.

In addition, many Ag Prep students enter high school below grade level academically. Providing students with their own laptop or tablet and requiring them to complete their work online allows Ag Prep schools to track student progress readily, identify student needs or trouble areas quickly, and provide personalized interventions and supports to help the students succeed in their rigorous courses.

## Increased Student Supports

From summer school to after school, Ag Prep students are receiving additional tutoring and other supports to help them succeed academically. Ag Prep teachers at each school are providing additional supports to help students with their more rigorous courses. For example, college courses are typically offered two or three days per

week; during the off-days, Ag Prep teachers and college tutors help students master the material. Wonderful College Prep Academy has an extended day (from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) for all students, and has set aside a study hall period daily for Ag Prep students. During that time, students work on their high school and college homework and have access to a dedicated teacher for assistance.

Each of the high schools is also providing tutoring and support through its own programs, such as after-school homework assistance and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). For example, Sanger High School provides "push-ins" and "pull-outs." In push-ins, an "intervention teacher" goes into specific classes—such as math or science—to work during the class period with students who are having difficulties. In pull-outs, students who are identified as struggling are pulled out of an elective in order to help them with math or English. Avenal High School provides a half-hour SMART period (Students Maximizing Achievement, Responsibility, and Time) daily, during which students work on their homework directly with a teacher.

Students at partnering high schools also have access to dedicated counselors who identify students who need help, plan appropriate interventions, and address issues that arise with college courses and instructors on the high school campus. Eventually, the partnering colleges will train students who have passed the college courses to provide tutoring to the high school students. In addition, all the high schools are hiring or have hired a coordinator to manage Ag Prep programs at the school and to facilitate communications and student interactions with partnering community colleges and industry. This will be particularly important when students begin their more extensive interactions with job shadowing and internships.

*"This is a way different experience... Now I study about 4 to 5 hours a day for my high school and college classes."*

— Ag Prep student

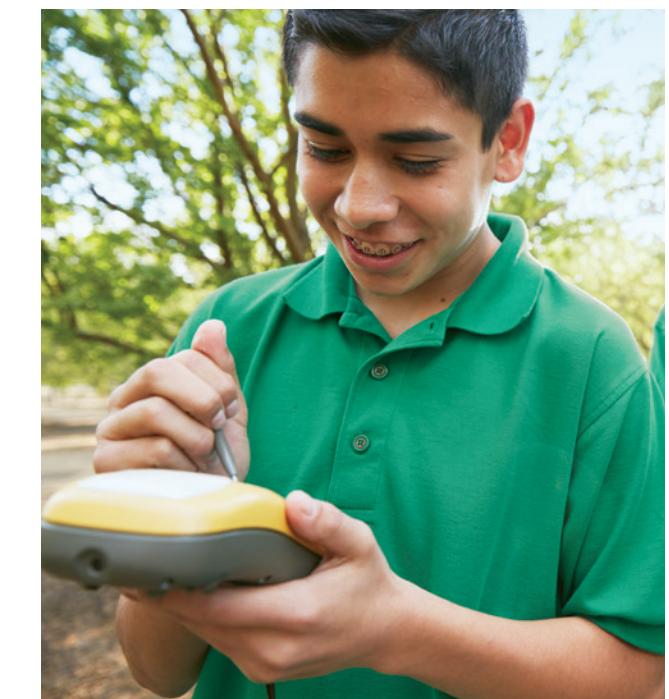
*"What I see is the excitement in students' eyes, when they see how this program is a fit for them, how it gives them opportunities right now. When their eyes light up, I get excited, too."*

— Juan Ruiz

Principal, Avenal High School

## A Different Daily Schedule

To accommodate college coursework, most of the schools are implementing a daily class schedule that features longer blocks of time, similar to a college schedule. Avenal High School has changed all classes to a block schedule in which students have different classes on different days. In comparison, McFarland High School has created "a block schedule embedded within the regular school schedule," said Principal Lori Schultz. At McFarland, periods 1 and 2 are joined for Ag Prep students, so that the longer college classes can be taught during that combined period. Any extra time is used to provide additional supports and tutoring for students.



## How Ag Prep Came Together

One of the unique aspects of Ag Prep is its independent status yet its close connections to schools, colleges, and the agricultural industry in the Central Valley. Ag Prep is a regional partnership that grew from long-standing efforts by The Wonderful Company—to invest in and improve the education of youth in California's Central Valley.

The Wonderful Company has been providing jobs and contributing to communities in the Valley for over 30 years. With its extensive investments in the Valley—including over 20 million fruit and nut trees—the company is here to stay, providing long-term, sustainable employment. The work has been guided by Lynda and Stewart Resnick, founders of The Wonderful Company. In education, their vision has been consistent: to promote better opportunities for young people in the Valley—through supporting early childhood education, parent engagement, college scholarships, college and career readiness, and other programs. Ag Prep deepens that work by bringing together public schools, community colleges, and industry—while also changing youth attitudes about college, careers, and agriculture.

*"It's a win-win for everybody. It's the right thing to do for our industry, for our communities, for families, and for youth in this valley."*

— David Krause

President, Wonderful Citrus

By early 2013, Wonderful College Prep Academy, a charter school in Delano, California, had already developed an early college model to support students in earning college credits while in high school. The school's four-year college-going rate for its first graduating class was 48%, which was about three times higher than that of local high schools. During the school's charter-renewal process, Wonderful College Prep Academy worked to strengthen

### Timeline: Leading the Way to Ag Prep

By working with school, college, and industry leaders to provide high school students with college credits and career experiences, Ag Prep offers a prototype for educational change—in the Central Valley and nationally.

#### 1994

The Wonderful Company begins providing large numbers of college scholarships to high school students, as part of their philanthropic support for Central Valley communities.

#### 1997

Wonderful Education is created by The Wonderful Company to expand their educational contributions and impacts. Wonderful Education provides grants to public schools across the Central Valley and funds summer camps, arts education, early childhood programs, college scholarships, and other school programs for students and families.

#### 2009

Wonderful College Prep Academy, a charter school, opens in Delano to increase college-going among Central Valley youth. Wonderful College Prep Academy, which is supported by The Wonderful Company, currently serves about 650 students in grades 6 to 12. The school offers an early college model integrated with two pathways: liberal arts and agriculture.

#### 2013

Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep (Ag Prep) is created as a regional partnership to provide sustainable opportunities for college and career success in the Central Valley. Ag Prep builds on the work of Wonderful Education, Wonderful College Prep Academy, public schools and colleges in the region, and industry to integrate an early college curriculum with career pathways and work-based learning in agriculture.



*"As a leader in the agriculture industry, we're building a runway to help teens get from high school to college and into career positions. If we can do it, others can too."*

— Stewart Resnick

Founder, The Wonderful Company

Soon thereafter, partnerships were created with McFarland High School and Bakersfield Community College, and with Sanger High School and Reedley Community College. In 2014, Ag Prep applied for a grant from the California Career Pathways Trust, which it received in the summer of that year. The grant provided the partnership with increased support and impact. Around the same time, Ag Prep brought together instructors from the partnering high schools and colleges for training and planning.

Ag Prep was formed in 2013 to expand the early college and career-pathways approach beyond the charter school and into several traditional public schools and community colleges in the San Joaquin Valley. Ag Prep already had strong support from industry and it had connections in public schools where Wonderful Education had already been distributing grants for some years. As a result, Wonderful Education's first step in developing Ag Prep was to reach beyond these partnerships to approach community colleges in the region. According to Noemi Donoso, Senior Vice President of Wonderful Education, "West Hills College was the first to sign on and create a career pathway in plant science with Avenal High School. Their vision and commitment helped to bring other colleges to the table to fill the skills gap and increase educational opportunity in the region."

Having industry commitment from the start helped Ag Prep expand. In interviews, high school and college leaders said that the participation of The Wonderful Company, in backing the project and providing internships, was crucial in helping the school districts and colleges gain support for the substantial changes now underway. They also said they would not have been able to take on the scope of this project without the vision and planning that the Wonderful Education team provides. For example, Jonathan Delano, Assistant Principal and Ag Prep Coordinator at Sanger High School, said that Wonderful Education continues to bring to the table important contacts that help provide perspective about the work, practical examples of other schools that have

launched similar projects, and a vision as to where this can go. He said that as a result of Wonderful Education's strategic support, "we're not trying to recreate the wheel. Our job is to connect all those possibilities to what will work on the ground, for our students."

Over the next years, Ag Prep partners will gather to analyze how well students are performing in the program, meet regularly to discuss and compare findings, and make adjustments along the way. Substantial changes in the educational experiences of students appear to be

underway, but the depth and scope of the transformations will take time. As Sandra Caldwell, president of Reedley College, said, "At the end of the day, our largest purpose is to create systemic economic change in the Central Valley. We approach that purpose through our work to create pathways to college and careers—to get a whole group of students involved in a college-going culture, which will lead to better completion in college and to work opportunities as well."

*"Education is here to multiply options exponentially, to where each student is not only receiving a rigorous and relevant education, but also their horizons are expanding every year."*

— Saúl González

Executive Director, Wonderful College Prep Academy





## **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.

Thad Nodine, the author of this publication, is an education writer affiliated with Jobs for the Future.

## **The Wonderful Company**

The W̄onderful Company is a privately held \$4 billion international company that offers healthy, iconic brands for healthy lifestyles. W̄onderful Pistachios & Almonds is the largest vertically integrated pistachio and almond grower and processor in the world. W̄onderful 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 W̄onderful Company's products can be found in the produce aisles of grocery stores nationwide under popular retail brands, including W̄onderful Pistachios, W̄onderful Almonds, W̄onderful Halos and P̄OM W̄onderful. For more information, go to [www.wonderful.com](http://www.wonderful.com).

## **W̄onderful Education Programs**

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



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