

California Table Grape Commission
Innovation in Teaching Grant Project Summaries
2025-26

Fresno County

Culinary Enrichment

Aleece Kilduff, John Sutter Middle School

Students can earn a Food Handler's Certification through the culinary enrichment class. After obtaining their certification, students are able to cook in the classroom and school cafeteria. Funds will cover the cost of certification fees, cooking supplies, and ingredients.

Student Reach: 75 | Grade: 6-12

Expanded Learning Program Garden Education Project

Catherine Diaz Burciaga, Future Unique Enthusiastic Leaders

Students will explore the life cycle of plants through the Garden Education Project—from seed development and propagation, to harvesting fruits and vegetables. In addition to growing produce, students will also participate in a student-led farmers market. Funds will be used to purchase seeds and plants, gardening tools and supplies, and farmers market materials.

Student Reach: 120 | Grade: TK-8

School Winter & Spring Garden Project

Christine Torosian-Klistoff, Fairmont Elementary School

Students will plant and maintain a winter and spring garden as part of the Agricultural Education Program, enhancing science, nutrition, and environmental literacy. Students will participate in preparing the soil, planting seeds and plants, maintaining garden beds, and harvesting crops. The garden will provide vegetables for the student-run farmers market. Funds will be used to purchase gardening equipment and supplies, plants, and seeds.

Student Reach: 350 | Grade: K-8

Communication for All Students

Cynthia Ramirez, Beth Ramacher Educational Complex

To support non-verbal students in the classroom, this project will create a designated communication area in the room that incorporates BIG TalkingBrix buttons. The buttons incorporate visual icons that are used regularly and voice output to give a more realistic approach to communicating. Funds will be used to purchase the buttons, which can help teach students the basics of communication and may reduce emotional disruptions.

Student Reach: 8 | Grade: 2-4

Rock Band Enrichment Course

David Hinsley, American Union Elementary School

The core objective of this course is to foster collaboration, creativity, and self-expression through music. By creating and performing music together, students will not only build musical skills, but also develop confidence, teamwork, and a shared sense of accomplishment. Funds will be used to purchase music equipment to provide students with hands-on music experience.

Student Reach: 49 | Grade: 7-8

Forest Explorers: Creative SEL Through Nature and Art

Jirlesa Montoya, Matthew J. Brletic Elementary School

Forest Explorers is an interactive, nature-based social emotional learning (SEL) project where students engage in weekly outdoor adventures that combine art, mindfulness, and hands-on environmental activities. Students will explore creative self-expression through nature-inspired art, garden projects, and sensory exercises designed to build emotional awareness, resilience, and teamwork. The goal is to help students connect with nature, themselves, and each other in a fun and therapeutic way. Funds will be used to cover field trip and material costs.

Student Reach: 80 | Grade: 3-6

Water, Weather, and Work: The Central Valley as the Nation's Breadbasket

Maria Garcia Martinez, Teague Elementary School

This project will immerse students in an engaging unit that explores how water, weather, and work sustain the crops that feed families across the globe. Funds will be used to purchase science kits, mapping and art supplies, books and digital resources, and field trip transportation costs.

Student Reach: 8 | Grade: K-1

From Vine to Vision: The Story of California's Table Grapes

Michael Stamps, Edison High School

This project will give Edison High School digital photo, videography, and cinematography students a unique, hands-on opportunity to tell the story of California's table grape industry through creative media. Students will engage with local growers, capture visuals from vineyard-to-table, and produce multimedia content that highlights sustainability, culture, and community impact. Funds will be used to purchase field production equipment, cover field trip costs, and a student exhibition.

Student Reach: 150 | Grade: 9-12

Grapes from California

Nicole Medeiros, Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School

Each student will create a unique masterpiece while they learn about the California table grape industry. Each grade level will use a different medium to create their art project, but all students will have a finished product of a bunch of grapes on a vine representing grapes grown in Fresno County. Funds will be used to purchase various art supplies.

Student Reach: 310 | Grade: K-6

Programming a Robotic Arm in Middle School

Tommy Martinez, Glacier Point Middle School

The goal of this project is to give students unique learning opportunities in the field of computer science and agriculture. Funds will be used to purchase a programmable robotic arm that all students can access while attending the library's Makerspace held at lunch. Students will be able to learn how to communicate and operate an AI-enhanced robotic arm using a form of block coding, and program the robotic arm to complete tasks beneficial to agricultural production and/or harvesting. Funds will be used to purchase the equipment.

Student Reach: 925 | Grade: 7-8

Wings of Knowledge: Youth Ag Tech Education Program

Vahid Motazedian, Coalinga High School

This project will engage a team of seven high school students from Coalinga High School in a hands-on AgTech project addressing powdery mildew in table grapes. Working under the joint supervision of a credentialed district teacher and Olinga staff, students will design, build, and program sensors to detect and track the disease in collaboration with a local grower in Fresno County.

Student Reach: 7 | Grade: 9-12

From Vine to Table: Hands-On Agricultural Learning for ESN Students

William Wilkerson, Beth Ramacher Educational Complex

"From Vine to Table" provides ESN (Extensive Support Needs) students with a hands-on agricultural learning experience focused on California's grape industry. Students will plant, care for, and observe grapevines and other crops in a school garden, developing functional life skills, academic knowledge, and an understanding of nutrition and agriculture.

Student Reach: 18 | Grade: Special Education Adults (18-22 years old)

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Kern County

Table Grape Genetics and Biotech

Alma Ruiz, Frontier High School

This project will give students hands-on experience with plant growth, genetics, and biotechnology. Using Wisconsin Fast Plants, students will explore Mendelian inheritance, and through a grape DNA extraction activity, they will connect molecular biology to California agriculture. Lessons will highlight innovations in grape breeding, including seedless and specialty varieties. Funds will be used to purchase Fast Plants and DNA extraction kits.

Student Reach: 185 | Grade: 9-10

Recycling/Re-use and Conservation

Carmelo Perez, Lamont Elementary School

Students will learn how to recycle, re-use, and conserve items we use everyday like aluminum, plastic, glass bottles, and cardboard, etc. Students will learn the importance of conservation and the awareness of the ill-effects of environmental pollution. Funds will be used to purchase materials for students to develop dioramas to visualize project topics.

Student Reach: 20 | Grade: 2-3

3D Story Creations

Clara Yanez, Buttonwillow School

Third grade students will read books, write their own creative stories, and then bring their characters or objects to life by designing and 3D-printing models. This project combines literacy with design thinking, helping students see how imagination can become tangible. Funds will be used to purchase a 3D printer and other project supplies.

Student Reach: 30 | Grade: 3

Build a Pillow Pet

Jennifer Neufeld, Robert F. Kennedy High School

During the veterinary career unit, students will choose any mammal and explore the internal and external anatomy. Students will then create drawings of the internal and external anatomy, which will serve as a blueprint of a take-home pillow pet.

Student Reach: 39 | Grade: 9-10

Teaching Healthy Habits – Through Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Nancy McNally, North Beardsley School

The Teaching Healthy Habits project will include lessons focused on physical health (exercise, nutrition, sleep), mental and emotional well being (recognizing emotions, self-regulation, goal setting), and social health (communication, kindness, school contract to acknowledge positive vs. negative behavior). Lessons will include hands-on activities to educate students on developing healthy habits they can carry into their adult lives.

Student Reach: 22 | Grade: Special Education 4-6

Kings County

The Great Grape Taste: Exploring Varieties and Nutrition

Wendy Welsh, John C. Fremont Elementary School

This project will engage students in a fun, hands-on exploration of California's table grape industry while strengthening skills in science, nutrition, and math. Students will study different grape varieties (red, green, and black) and discover the nutritional benefits. The class will conduct a "Great Grape Taste Test" sampling and chart preferences. Students will use their data to create bar graphs and create a persuasive paragraph titled, "Why Grapes Are Great!"

Student Reach: 21 | Grade: 2

Madera County

School-wide Art Installation: Striving for GRAPEness at SCE

Arielle Meisner-DiPinto, Stone Creek Elementary

Kindergarten through sixth grade students will contribute to a school wide art mural that will be displayed in the multi-purpose room. Each grade level is responsible for creating a different grape component of the mural, with age-appropriate art techniques to create their individual grapes. Funds will be used to purchase art supplies.

Student Reach: 900 | Grade: K-6

Riverside County

Sensory Needs Project

Elizabeth Aceves, Dr. Carreon Academy

The need for sensory equipment increases as special education classroom sizes increase. This project will create a safe and sensory-enriched area within the classroom to help students self-regulate. Having appropriate and a well-equipped sensory area will benefit students currently enrolled and future students alike.

Student Reach: 14 | Grade: K-2

Grow Easy, Eat Healthy: The PDHS Garden Adventure

Kayla Adler, Palm Desert High School

Students across all grades and ability levels will work together to build and maintain multiple garden spaces on campus which provide hands-on, experiential learning in nutrition, science, and agriculture, encouraging healthier eating habits, fostering emotional connections to food, and deepening appreciation for nature. Funds will be used to purchase garden materials.

Student Reach: 100 | Grade: 9-12

Science Olympiad Club

Fernando Villagomez, Palm Desert High School

The Palm Desert High School Science Olympiad Club is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of scientists, engineers, and critical thinkers through rigorous competition and impactful community service. Funds will be used to support the clubs' activities, which include organizing and hosting after school science fair events at local elementary schools, year-round skill-building training sessions, and participating in the regional competition.

Student Reach: 60 | Grade: 9-12

¿De donde viene las idea para crear inventos?

Rosa Hernandez, Ronald Reagan Elementary School

The dual language immersion class will look beyond the school anthology that highlights inventors, and their inventions and solutions. With these funds, the educational unit will be extended to showcase diverse inventors that reflect the student population. Specifically, funds will purchase new books on additional inventors and programmable robots for hands-on learning and ideation.

Student Reach: 50 | Grade: 2

Tulare County

Growing Math

John Lujan, Butterfield Charter High School

Students will be responsible for creating a school garden using raised beds, including identifying a location on campus, what plants to grow, and identify and purchase the necessary materials. Real-world math performance tasks will be integrated into the planning and maintenance of the garden. Funds will be used to purchase garden materials.

Student Reach: 22 | Grade: 7-8

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Vines of Discovery: Connecting Agriculture and Education

Maria Villa, Waukena Elementary School

Vines of Discovery is an innovative learning project designed to connect students to California's rich agricultural heritage through hands-on, interdisciplinary experiences. This project will integrate science, nutrition, and art to help students explore the journey of the California table grape — from vine to table — while fostering curiosity, creativity, and real-world learning. Funds will be used to purchase classroom supplies, fresh grapes and agricultural materials for experiments, and materials for a culminating student showcase.

Student Reach: 50 | Grade: TK-8