



PRESS RELEASE

Los Banos Students Learn the Valuable Lessons of Growing Food

LOS BANOS, Calif., March 25 – Fourth-graders at R. M. Miano Elementary School in Los Banos learned firsthand Thursday what it takes to grow watermelons, almonds and dairy feed.

The 33 students were the proud recipients of a \$1,500 award from the California Fertilizer Foundation (CFF), along with its fully-funded field trip, because of the exemplary work in connecting gardening to agriculture via its campus school garden. Each year, CFF presents \$1,200 each to 24 California schools in order to grow school gardens.



Miano students plant watermelon seedlings.

“The importance of school gardens and a field trip is that they offer students a chance to understand that their food doesn’t magically appear on grocery shelves,” said Pam Emery, program director for the CFF. “During events like this one, they actually see how crops are planted, cared for and grown to eventually be packaged for store shelves. They actually get a chance to get their hands dirty.”

The students had a full day of learning about agriculture, starting off with a bus trip to a Livingston farm operated by Dan Avila, who grows watermelons. After learning that seedless watermelons need to be cross-pollinated with a seeded variety to produce its luscious fruit, the students went to work planting seedlings.

“I think it’s interesting that they plant barley between the watermelon rows to keep the sand from blowing,” said one of the fourth-graders as he walked the field making sure the watermelon plants that he had planted were standing tall as “Farmer Dan” required.

After that, the students walked to a nearby almond orchard to examine the fuzzy young fruit, probe the grafting of the almond trees, and compare all the different varieties of trees grown in the orchard. “It’s fuzzy like a peach,” said one youngster, who learned that peaches and almonds are related trees.

From there, they headed to the Hilmar Cheese Co. in Hilmar to make cheese and ice cream and find out what it takes to produce the feed that dairy cows eat. At the end of the day, the



fourth-graders piled back into the bus for their return home. They discussed how many new things they had learned about agriculture and were appreciative that their eyes had been opened to the hard work and long process involved in getting food to their dinner tables.

PHOTOS: (Top) Miano Elementary Students pose for a picture upon arriving at a farm in Livingston to plant watermelon seedlings.



(Middle and bottom) Students learned a lot about making cheese and ice cream at the Hilmar Cheese Company in Hilmar.

(Photos by Pam Emery)

