CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

FARM TO SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

Learn About Ag®
California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Amanda Fletcher
Executive Director
CA Foundation for Ag in the Classroom

LearnAboutAg.org

Why Are You Here?

- **I’m curious.** I want to learn what Farm to School is all about.
- **I’m starting out.** I’m looking for ideas to bring into my classroom, cafeteria, or program.
- **I’m growing.** I’ve tried some activities and want to do more.
- **I’m rooted.** I’m already engaged and here to share, connect, and deepen my impact.

What is CFAITC?

Who we are:

California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating youth throughout California about the importance of agriculture in their daily lives. We are an affiliate company of the California Farm Bureau.

Who we serve: Pre-K through 12th grade educators throughout the state of California

What is CFAITC?

How we serve:

- Develop materials that are accurate, teacher-tested and scientifically sound to enhance the educational experience of PreK-12 students. All provided for FREE!
- Provide programs, inspiration and training opportunities for educators.
- Partner with like-minded organizations to create awareness about the significance of agriculture in our everyday lives.
- Recognize teachers and students for their achievements in agricultural literacy.
- Support the pursuit of agricultural careers and continuing education.

Our Team

Amanda Fletcher
Executive Director

Jill Miller
Program Director

Alyssa Boydstun
Program Coordinator
Southern California

Morgan Nunes
Program Coordinator
Central California

Claire Broaddus
Program Coordinator
Northern California

Marjie Zarinelli
Curriculum Developer

Mandi Bottoms
Curriculum Specialist

Becca Whitman
Strategic Relations

Programs

CA Virtual Farm Day

March 18, 2026

Farm to School Journey

Imagine this... Storywriting Contest

Open to 3rd - 8th Grades

Stories are due annually on Nov 1

Programs

Literacy for Life Grants

$750 for an agriculture project

Applications due in October

Taste & Teach

10 months of commodity curriculum

Applications open in June

Programs

Farm to Future

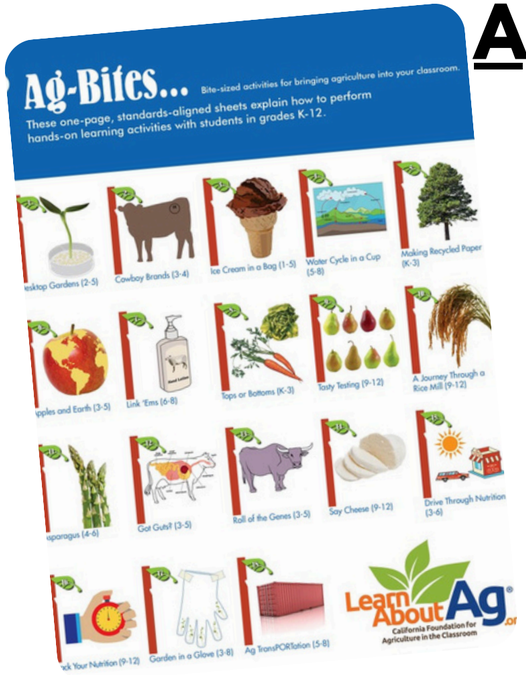
Young Farmers & Ranchers
come read & do activities with class

Annual Teacher Conference

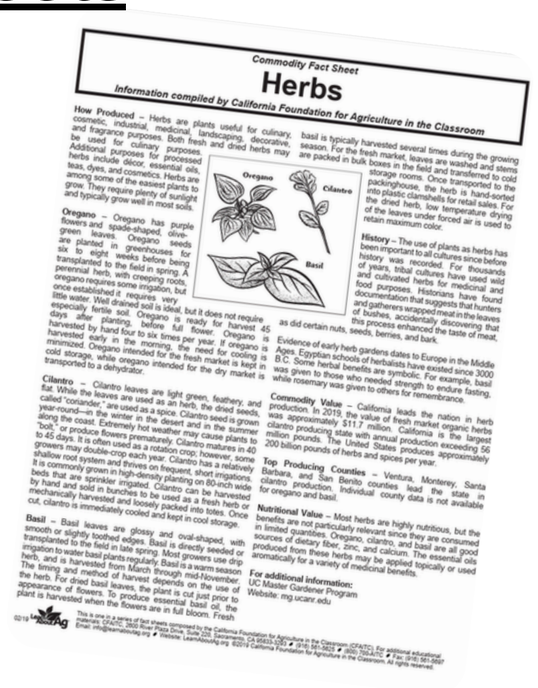
2026 Regional One-Day seminars
SoCal - October 10 in San Diego

Resources

Ag Bites



Fact Sheets


Commodity Fact Sheet

Herbs

Information compiled by California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

How Produced – Herbs are plants useful for culinary, cosmetic, industrial, medicinal, landscaping, decorative, and fragrance purposes. Both fresh and dried herbs may be used for culinary purposes. Additional purposes for processed herbs include décor, essential oils, teas, dyes, and cosmetics. Herbs are among some of the easiest plants to grow. They require plenty of sunlight and typically grow well in most soils.

Oregano – Oregano has purple flowers and spade-shaped, olive-green leaves. Oregano seeds are planted in greenhouses for six to eight weeks before being transplanted to the field in spring. A perennial herb, with creeping roots, oregano requires some irrigation, but once established it requires very little water. Well drained soil is ideal, but it does not require especially fertile soil. Oregano is ready for harvest 45 days after planting, before full flower. Oregano is harvested by hand four to six times per year. If oregano is harvested early in the morning, the need for cooling is minimized. Oregano intended for the fresh market is kept in cold storage, while oregano intended for the dry market is transported to a dehydrator.

Cilantro – Cilantro leaves are light green, feathery, and flat. While the leaves are used as an herb, the dried seeds, called "coriander," are used as a spice. Cilantro seed is grown year-round—in the winter in the desert and in the summer along the coast. Extremely hot weather may cause plants to "bolt," or produce flowers prematurely. Cilantro matures in 40 to 45 days. It is often used as a rotation crop; however, some growers may double-crop each year. Cilantro has a relatively shallow root system and thrives on frequent, short irrigations. It is commonly grown in high-density planting on 80-inch wide beds that are sprinkler irrigated. Cilantro can be harvested by hand and sold in bunches to be used as a fresh herb or mechanically harvested and loosely packed into totes. Once cut, cilantro is immediately cooled and kept in cool storage.

Basil – Basil leaves are glossy and oval-shaped, with smooth or slightly toothed edges. Basil is directly seeded or transplanted to the field in late spring. Most growers use drip irrigation to water basil plants regularly. Basil is a warm season herb, and is harvested from March through mid-November. The timing and method of harvest depends on the use of the herb. For dried basil leaves, the plant is cut just prior to appearance of flowers. To produce essential basil oil, the plant is harvested when the flowers are in full bloom. Fresh basil is typically harvested several times during the growing season. For the fresh market, leaves are washed and stems are packed in bulk boxes in the field and transferred to cold storage rooms. Once transported to the packinghouse, the herb is hand-sorted into plastic clamshells for retail sales. For the dried herb, low temperature drying of the leaves under forced air is used to retain maximum color.

Oregano
Cilantro
Basil

History – The use of plants as herbs has been important to all cultures since before history was recorded. For thousands of years, tribal cultures have used wild and cultivated herbs for medicinal and food purposes. Historians have found documentation that suggests that hunters and gatherers wrapped meat in the leaves of bushes, accidentally discovering that this process enhanced the taste of meat, as did certain nuts, seeds, berries, and bark.

Evidence of early herb gardens dates to Europe in the Middle Ages. Egyptian schools of herbalists have existed since 3000 B.C. Some herbal benefits are symbolic. For example, basil was given to those who needed strength to endure fasting, while rosemary was given to others for remembrance.

Commodity Value – California leads the nation in herb production. In 2019, the value of fresh market organic herbs was approximately $11.7 million. California is the largest cilantro producing state with annual production exceeding 56 million pounds. The United States produces approximately 200 billion pounds of herbs and spices per year.

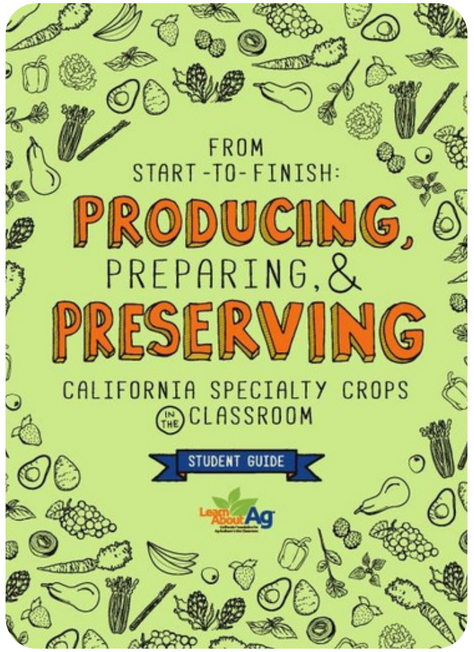
Top Producing Counties – Ventura, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and San Benito counties lead the state in cilantro production. Individual county data is not available for oregano and basil.

Nutritional Value – Most herbs are highly nutritious, but the benefits are not particularly relevant since they are consumed in limited quantities. Oregano, cilantro, and basil are all good sources of dietary fiber, zinc, and calcium. The essential oils produced from these herbs may be applied topically or used aromatically for a variety of medicinal benefits.

For additional information:
UC Master Gardener Program
Website: mg.ucanr.edu

This is one in a series of fact sheets composed by the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (CFAITC). For additional educational materials: CFAITC, 2800 River Oaks Drive, Suite 220, Sacramento, CA 95833-3293 ✔ (916) 561-5625 ✔ (800) 700-AITC ✔ Fax: (916) 561-5697
Email: info@learnaboutag.org ✔ Website: LearnAboutAg.org

Lesson Units



Resources

Posters

What's Growin' On?

Student Friendly Websites

LearnAboutAg®
California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

Farm to School Resources

Printable Posters

Includes:

- Botanical information
- Nutritional benefits
- Farmer connection
- Jokes
- Facts that are interesting to kids!

Commodity Mini Books

- Valuable content delivery in a kid-friendly format
- Home connection, students share what they are learning
- Line art for coloring and responding to text
- Each book is unique

Monthly Newsletters

Features:

- Farmer profile
- Nutritional benefits
- Food play and recipes
- Lesson plan and worksheet
- Recommended videos
- Curated resources: books, websites, lessons, and activities

farm TO SCHOOL

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

THIS MONTH WE'RE HARVESTING Melons!

In This Issue

PLAY with your Food

CLASSROOM Connection

virtual FIELD TRIP

AND MORE!

Farmer Spotlight TOMMY BOTTOMS - TREMONT FARMS DIXON, CA

In 2022, Tommy Bottoms and his wife, Mandi, launched Tremont Farms near Davis, California. After earning his PhD in plant sciences at UC Davis, Bottoms decided he wanted to farm himself rather than stay in academia. Before starting his own operation, he gained hands-on experience working with other farmers in the area. Today, he and Mandi manage 6,000 acres planted with a mix of crops, including four types of melons: hami, cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon.

Seedless watermelon has been a special focus for Bottoms over the past five years. Planting starts each spring when the soil warms, usually in April, so harvest lines up with summer demand. Tractors build raised beds for each row. Later, workers ride behind a tractor and plant young watermelon plants by hand. They add water to each plant to help it grow strong roots.

Drip irrigation keeps water flowing to the roots while keeping the fruit dry. Bees are just as important as water. "The real heroes of watermelon production are the bees," Bottoms said. "We do everything in our power to create an environment where the bees are happy and willing to work." Watermelon vines grow bright yellow flowers that must be pollinated for the fruit to form. Once pollinated, the melons take about 45 days to ripen.

Knowing when a watermelon is ready to harvest takes a trained eye. Growers look for the right size, check for the pale spot on the underside, and watch a small tendril near the stem that dries out as the fruit matures. Many will also tap the melon and listen for a clear ping instead of a dull thud.

Fields are harvested in stages. "A single field will be picked two or three times," said Bottoms. "That first pick usually brings in about half the crop." Melons are sorted by size, packed into bins, and loaded onto trucks bound for grocery stores, distribution centers, and food service buyers. Some of Bottoms' watermelons even end up at his daughters' elementary school, where students get to taste them fresh in the classroom. "Being able to share our melons with the community is always rewarding," he said. "We're proud to grow a fruit that everyone can enjoy."

FOOD for FUEL

HERE ARE SOME OF THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF INCLUDING MELONS IN YOUR DIET:

Melons provide unique health benefits. They are full of essential vitamins and a natural source of beneficial antioxidants.

Immune System SUPPORT

Cantaloupe and honeydew melons are packed with vitamin C, which helps keep your body healthy and fight off sickness.

Healthy HEART

Watermelon contains an antioxidant called lycopene, which gives the fruit its red color. Lycopene helps protect your body's cells from damage and supports heart health.

Hydration HELP

Melons like watermelon and honeydew are mostly water. Eating them helps you stay hydrated, which helps your body feel good and makes it easier for food to move through your body.

LearnAboutAg.org

PLAY with your Food

Research shows there are many benefits of playing with food!

PLAY with your Food

FROGGY FACE TOAST

Turning avocado toast into a froggy-faced snack is a fun way to enjoy this creamy green fruit. With its smooth texture and mild flavor, avocado makes a great base for playful food art. Using simple ingredients, kids can create a snack while picking up a few kitchen skills like cutting, mashing, and toasting along the way. Makes two servings.

Ingredients:

- *1 English muffin*
- *1 avocado*
- *1 hard-boiled egg*
- *Shredded carrots*
- *Sliced olives*

Tools:

Child-safe knife and cutting board, toaster, grater, small plate or tray for serving

Always check student information, especially allergies, before preparing or serving food to keep everyone safe.

(Adapted from joannasnannies.com)

Directions:

1. *Gently wash all produce under cold running water.*
2. *Cut the English muffin in half and toast both halves until golden.*
3. *Cut the avocado in half, remove the pit, and scoop the flesh into a small bowl. Mash with a fork until smooth.*
4. *Spread the mashed avocado evenly over the toasted muffin halves.*
5. *Slice the hard-boiled egg into rounds. On each muffin half, place two egg slices near the top of the round to make the frog's eyes.*
6. *Place a sliced olive in the center of each egg round for the pupils.*
7. *Use shredded carrots to make a smile or tongue for the frog.*
8. *Arrange the froggy faces on a plate and serve right away.*

Discussion

What benefits have you observed when students engage with their food through play?

CLASSROOM Connection

The **Classroom Connection** is a teacher-facing lesson plan aligned to standards AND a student-facing printable worksheet.

CLASSROOM Connection

Avocado Inspection

In this lesson, students step into the role of produce inspectors to examine avocados closely. They'll inspect size, shape, and quality, learning how experts ensure only the best fruit reaches our tables. Using observation and measurement skills, students gain hands-on experience with food standards and quality control in agriculture.

Objectives:

Students will work in teams to inspect avocados using observation, measurement, and math skills. They will weigh fruit parts, calculate ratios, and learn how quality is judged in agriculture.

California Standards: CC Math: 4.MD.A.1, 5.NBT.B.7, 6.RP.A.3, 6.NS.B.3

Materials: Ripe avocados, digital scale or balance, small paper plates, spoons and plastic knives, hand lens, paper towels, worksheet (page 3).

Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: "Would you rather have an avocado with a giant seed or one packed with creamy green goodness?" Today they will step into the role of a produce inspector to determine which avocados are worth sending to the stores.
2. Introduce avocados and briefly discuss where they're grown and how they're used. Explain that before avocados make it to our kitchens, inspectors check them for size, shape, ripeness, and any defects like bruises or blemishes that could affect quality.
3. Explain the inspection challenge: in teams, students will observe, measure, and analyze an avocado to determine if it meets quality standards. They'll use a worksheet to guide their process and record findings.
4. Divide students into small groups and provide each group with the listed materials. Groups work together to complete their inspection using observation and math skills.
5. Once all groups have finished, invite them to share their results and compare findings. Which avocado had the best quality? Did your group find signs of damage or poor quality? What could be done with those avocados to help reduce food waste?
6. Wrap up by reflecting on the importance of quality control in agriculture and how science and math help keep our food safe and of the highest quality.

CLASSROOM Connection

Name: _____

Avocado Inspection

Get ready to step into the shoes of a real produce inspector! In this activity, you'll take a close look at one avocado to see how it measures up. You'll check for:

- External defects (what you see on the outside)
- Internal defects (what you find on the inside)
- The ratio of flesh to whole fruit (how much of the avocado you can actually eat!)

Before you start, weigh your whole avocado and record the mass: _____ grams

EXTERNAL DEFECTS

Give your avocado a score from 1 to 10 for each defect. A score of 1 means only a small part is damaged. A score of 10 means the whole thing is. Look closely to decide how much of the surface is affected.

DEFECT SCORE

Ridging _____ Scarring _____

Sunburn _____ Lenticel Damage _____

INTERNAL DEFECTS

(CHECK IF PRESENT)
Cut the avocado in half. Look inside and place a checkmark next to any internal defects you see:

- ☐ Flesh color is pale
- ☐ Flesh discoloration
- ☐ Flesh stuck to pit
- ☐ Stem end rot

FLESH RATIO

1. Scoop the flesh onto a paper plate. Then weigh the skin and record its mass: _____ grams
2. Next, weigh the pit and record its mass: _____ grams
3. Find the mass of the flesh by subtracting the pit and skin mass from the total avocado mass you recorded earlier.
   Mass of flesh: _____ grams
4. To find the percent of flesh, divide the flesh mass by the total mass, then multiply by 100.
   % Flesh: _____ %
5. Most good avocados have 60–70% flesh. Less means lower quality. More means excellent! How would you describe the quality of your avocado?

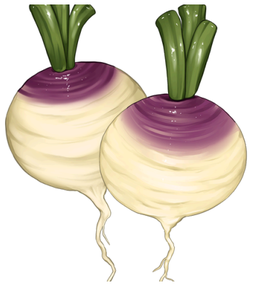
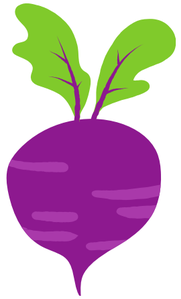
_____

_____

Scan the QR code to see pictures and examples of each defect to help you identify them more easily.

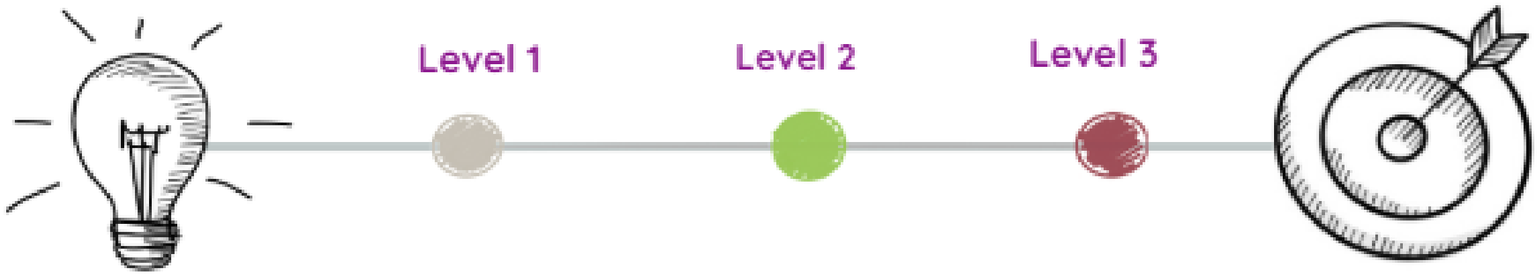
Scan Me

Linking Lessons to Lunch

"Lettuce turnip the beet in school nutrition!"

Farm to School on a Spectrum

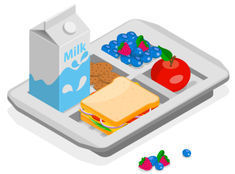


1. **Introductory:** Classroom discussions, simple taste tests
2. **Developing:** Menu tie-ins, local produce highlights
3. **Advanced:** Cafeteria regularly sources from farms, school gardens supply the cafeteria

What Drives Menu Decisions?

For more on compliance and reimbursement, we recommend to contact The State:
California Department of Education (CDE)

Meal Pattern Requirements Daily



Breakfast: Must offer 3 meal components → Grain/MMA, Fruit & Milk

Lunch: Must offer 5 meal components → Grain, MMA, Fruit, Vegetable & Milk

Reimbursement Breakdown

School Districts receive...

~$3 for breakfast to cover all 3 meal components

and

No more than $5 per lunch to cover all 5 meal components + labor

What Strong Partnerships Look Like

- Regular communication and mutual support between teachers and nutrition staff
- Teachers contribute engagement and learning; FSD brings food expertise
- Shared successes: increased student participation and enhanced real-world learning

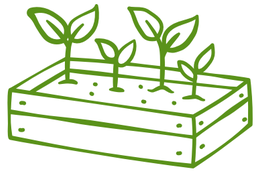
Ways Teachers Can Support F2S

- Host classroom taste tests of upcoming menu items
- Run school-wide food polls and share results with the cafeteria (ask first!)
- Align lessons with cafeteria offerings (e.g., HOTM)
- Invite farmers or food service staff as guest speakers
- Create posters, videos, or campaigns to promote local foods
- Start student-led garden with culinary herbs, fruits or vegetables

Conversation Starter & Decision Tree

If we were to start a student garden, what types of produce would you be able to include on the menu?

Talking Points For Teachers



Partnering with Your Food Service Director

Align classroom activities with cafeteria menus so students see, taste, and learn—repeated exposure builds excitement for healthy foods.

"Which seasonal fruits/vegetables will be on the menu this month?"

"Are there local farmers we can highlight in lessons?"

"Could we grow herbs/veggies for the cafeteria?"

"Which recipes on the menu would fit best for a cooking demonstration in the classroom?"

"What barriers do you face with fresh/local foods?"

"Would student-led research or marketing help?"

Examples of Strong Partnerships

- **Seasonal Spotlight:** A 4th grade class studies apples in science and math, designs posters about local varieties, and the cafeteria features those same apples in a crisp at lunch.
- **Taste Test Teamwork:** Middle school students sample a roasted chickpea recipe in class, give feedback, and then see the dish debut on the cafeteria menu the following week.
- **Menu Planning Tie-In:** Teachers learn broccoli will be served in March and align a nutrition lesson, cooking demo, and garden activity so students experience it before tasting it at lunch.
- **Student Marketing Crew:** High school marketing or art students create flyers, table tents, and social media posts to promote the cafeteria's "Harvest of the Month."
- **Garden-to-Tray Connection**: Students grow basil in the school garden; the cafeteria uses it in pasta sauce, while teachers connect it to lessons on plant life cycles.
- **Food & Culture Integration:** During a world cultures unit, students research regional recipes. The cafeteria serves one adapted to USDA standards for students to try.

What ideas do you have to turnip the beet in your district?

Let’s Keep in Touch!

Sign up for our e-newsletter to be entered to win a poster!

My Contact

Amanda Fletcher
Executive Director

amanda@learnaboutag.org

SoCal Contact

Alyssa Boydstun
Program Coordinator
Southern California

alyssa@learnaboutag.org