



FARMS Leadership Program



The FARMS Leadership Program provides an enriched and unique learning opportunity for high school students, one that introduces the importance of agriculture, natural resource conservation, and socio-cultural-economic factors that impact our resource management decisions.



This unique fingerprint of the FARMS Leadership Program is delivered by the Sotoyome Resource Conservation District in Sonoma County, the host for one of ten program sites found throughout the state of California. The program itself is overseen by the Center for Land-Based Learning, based in Winters, Ca. Locally, the Southern Sonoma County RCD also hosts a FARMS Leadership Program site.



Only a limited number of experiential programs address both environmental education and agricultural literacy simultaneously. Thirty participants are recruited from up to five area high schools, and attend monthly field days at farms, ranches, and ecological preserves during the school year. A combination of talks, tours, and hands-on learning shapes each field day.



Through the program, students gain a basic awareness of California's agricultural commodities and importance, identify fish and wildlife conservation issues, learn about successes and challenges shaping our county, and visit innovative projects that address complex resource management needs.

The program orients youth in how to think about these issues, not what to think about them. It raises the level of critical thought about natural resource conservation, and enables students to become part of the informed dialogue in their communities. It builds leadership skills.



When students understand the larger context of agriculture, coupled with an understanding of the limits to our water supply and land for household and recreational needs, they become citizens and consumers able to make objective decisions. These decisions impact their own backyard, supporting or degrading sustained agricultural presence & environmental conservation.

It is reasoned that we value most what we see, hear, and practice firsthand. The principles of this program combine learning and practice. Participants engage in restoration and farming related projects that benefit the community, promote resource conservation, and sustain agricultural production.



This program also links students to career and occupational pathways by introducing mentors and academic programs that help them develop professional skills. Our volunteer mentors and farmers provide important connections to the transition from the academic to working world.



Our 2004-05 funders include the Mary Crocker Foundation, the David B. Gold Foundation, The Bill Graham Foundation, Sonoma County Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the CalFed ecological restoration program. Donations provided by Whole Foods Market, Oliver's market, SaraLee's vineyards, the California Pistachio Commission and Almond Board have enhanced our field days.



For More information on this program, and/or our local partners, contact Rick Kaye at (707) 569-1448 or rkaye@sotoyomercd.org. The Center for Land-Based Learning website is at www.landbasedlearning.org.