

# Tulare’s World Ag Expo, Day 3: 1,800 of students join first-ever show tour

By Robert Rodriguez



Students from Visalia’s Golden West High School take part in the World Ag Expo in Tulare.

ROBERT RODRIGUEZ — THE FRESNO BEE

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The World Ag Expo in Tulare wrapped up its three-day run on Thursday with capacity crowds, including more than 1,850 students from throughout the San Joaquin Valley.



“It was by far a record year,” said Jerry Sinift, chief executive officer of the International Agri-Center in Tulare where the expo is held. “We actually came close to running out of parking.”

Sinift estimates the show attracted about 100,000 visitors over the last three days.



Helping to boost those numbers was the swarm of high school students that were part of a new program to give students a better understanding of agriculture, the careers involved and how a major trade show operates.

The students visited with more than 50 exhibitors and were given a personal tour of the sprawling expo grounds. For some students, the expo was very familiar territory, while for others it was a new experience.

For 15-year-old Sayra Arrequin of Visalia, touring the World Ag Expo on Thursday was like being in a different world. Arrequin, a student with Golden West High School's Business and Finance Academy, was wowed by the size of the tractors and the size of the show.

This year, more than 1,500 exhibitors spread out on over 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space at the International Agri-Center in Tulare.

"It is so big," she said. "And there are things I have never seen before."

Arrequin was impressed with the company that can grow grass feed for livestock animals in just a matter of days.

"That was cool," she said.

Elaine Rubio, coordinator for the school's Business and Finance Academy, said the students were lucky to be able to get a close up look at how one of the world's largest trade shows looks like. One of the goals of the schools program is to teach students business and marketing skills.

"If you want to learn about what it takes to get your product recognized and how to sell it, this is the place to do it," Rubio said.

Ag expo volunteer Carrie Crane jumped at the chance to help lead a group of high schools students around the World Ag Expo on Thursday. Crane is the program coordinator for the Tulare County Farm Bureau and a big believer in agriculture education.

Crane, who led a group of FFA students from Exeter, said there is often a disconnect between the public and farmers. Many people are still unaware of how their food is produced.

"It may sound hard to believe but when I go and talk at schools, I find students who think milk is made at the grocery store," she said. "They don't understand that a farm is involved. We really need to overcome that misconception."

Crane said one of the reasons programs like Thursday's tour are important is because it gives students an opportunity to learn more about farming and how many people are involved in producing a crop.

"The public needs to understand that farmers are not bad people," she said. "I care just as much as anybody about the safety of our food and how it is grown."

Along with Tulare County schools, the expo also attracted the interest of students from Sunnyside High School in Fresno. The school brought 150 students who are part of its Agriscience and Technology Pathway program. The four-year program provides students with the opportunity to learn more about pursuing a career in agriculture and technology.

"And what better opportunity to expose our students to a multi-billion dollar industry than bringing them here," said Sunnyside teacher Paul Magarity. "The students are really getting an idea of how many related businesses are involved in agriculture and how many people they employ. They also got the chance to learn about all the innovation and technology that is involved."

One student who couldn't get enough of the expo was Vang Yang, whose parents are field workers harvesting cherry tomatoes.

Yang said he wants to be a plant scientist, in part because of how Valley agriculture has been affected by the ongoing drought.

“I see what it has done and I want to be able to develop plant varieties that can withstand harsh conditions, to save water and to save jobs,” Yang said.

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