



## Fresno State: Growing From Agrarian Roots to Cultivate Tomorrow's Leaders



For California State University, Fresno, located in one of the most bountiful agricultural regions in the world, it was inevitable that agriculture would become one of the university's key academic components.

Fresno State was founded in 1911 with 150 students as Fresno State Normal School,

largely to prepare teachers. Historical documents show that since 1914, a full range of agricultural courses were available and even mandated as graduation requirements. The first director of agriculture was appointed in 1919. In 1921, the school was renamed Fresno State Teachers College and began offering bachelor's degrees. Advanced degrees have been offered since 1949.

"Agriculture was always an important part of the college," said Associate Vice President for University Communications Shirley Melikian Armbruster. "The growth of the university and growth of agriculture have been on parallel paths since the beginning."

Early faculty and staff believed in providing practical, hands-on learning for students. They knew that for the program to continue to grow, this would be a necessary component of the education provided. The first school farm was established in 1929.

The evolution of Fresno State's farm makes it unlike other universities. Today, the farm is just over 1,000 acres and one of the most diverse to be found on any college campus in the United States. Additionally, the working farm is located at the site of the campus, which enhances the education students receive in the classroom.

The Ag One Foundation at Fresno State has played an important role in supporting the Jordan College. Established in 1979, this 501(c)3 was developed by several faculty, alumni and friends to benefit and support the college and its programs. Over the years, the Ag One Foundation has raised more than \$17 million in endowment funds and has provided more than 3,500 students with scholarships and grants.

In 2009, the Jordan family, of Hayward, made a \$29.4 million donation to Fresno State, then the largest of its kind in the history of the university. To recognize the family's generosity, the college was renamed the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology.

"The Jordan College is unique because we are so inclusive of every part of the food and agriculture chain - we like to describe it as "farm to fork and everything in between," said Dr. Sandra Witte, who has been at Fresno State since 1992 and was appointed dean of the college earlier this year. "Whether it's teaching soil management to grow a better crop of tomatoes or understanding the family dynamic that promotes healthy food choices, we do it all."

In addition to the Jordan College, Fresno State offers education through a variety of schools and divisions, including: College of Arts and Humanities; Craig School of Business; Kremen School of Education and Human Development; Lyles College of Engineering; College of Health and Human Services; College of Science and Mathematics; College of Social Sciences; Division of Graduate Studies; and Division of Continuing and Global Education.

The university's primary service area is composed of the four surrounding counties: Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare. However, students from across the state and country and around the world attend Fresno State.

"In fall 2016, we will enroll about 900 international students," said Armbruster. "This is helpful in giving all students exposure to international colleagues and ideas."

Fresno State employs more than 2,300 full- and part-time faculty and staff. More than 24,000 students are enrolled. In the Jordan College alone, there are more than 2,400 undergraduate students and 100 graduate students.

"Student success is always our first goal," said Armbruster. "Our mission statement is 'To boldly educate and empower students for success.' That means helping students move through their work and graduate in a timely manner."

Armbruster said Fresno State is a university of opportunity for first-generation students as well as those whose families have a long history of college. Approximately two-thirds of the students are the first in their families to work toward a degree in higher education.

Another hallmark of the university is its connection to the community and the region through student volunteer service and

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internships. Fresno State is nationally recognized for its community service.

### **Leadership has ties to the Valley**

Fresno State President Joseph I. Castro has strong roots in the Valley. He is a native of Hanford. His grandparents immigrated from Mexico to the United States. His wife, Mary, is also from the Valley community of Laton.

In one of his first speeches as president, he said, "It's great to be back! I know the Valley...I don't need a GPS to find my way around." The family still has close ties to the area.

After graduating from high school in Hanford, Castro attended the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University for his advanced degrees. He was the first in his family to graduate from college. He worked at several UC campuses prior to his appointment in 2013 at Fresno State as the eighth university president.

"President Castro is a wonderful fit for the university and the community," said Armbruster. "Since he began at Fresno State, his focus has been on lifting up the agricultural program. He's dedicated to making sure it is the best. We want to be the premiere agricultural university in the world."

### **University research and technology leading the way**

At Fresno State, there is major focus on water research and technology. The International Center for Water Technology and the Center for Irrigation Technology are recognized globally. Educators, researchers and scientists from throughout the world visit Fresno State to learn best practices in water management and irrigation. The Jordan College recently received a \$5 million grant from the California Energy Commission to establish the Central Valley Regional Energy Cluster. The focus will be to significantly expand incubation services for entrepreneurs developing energy technologies for water and agriculture sectors and connecting them with business and economic development organizations in the Central Valley and Northern California.

Additionally, the Jordan Agricultural Research Center was opened on May 13, 2016. The 30,000-square-foot facility offers an area to investigate and discover advanced concepts and practices of agriculture, food and natural resources, while fostering collaboration between agriculture, engineering, science and mathematics.

The research center is the first of its kind in the California State University system. Dry and wet research laboratories, flexible space and meeting rooms are available for Fresno State students and faculty to conduct advanced studies in agriculture, food and water.

"Fresno State became a Friends of the Family Farm premium member because of the strong agricultural focus at the University," said Armbruster. "Partnering with the Farm Bureau in promoting agriculture to the fullest extent is important to the University and our entire region."