

# California Crops: From the Farm to the Table

## Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is for students to appreciate that California is a major agricultural state. They will gather information on the production of one specific California agricultural commodity.

## Time

### *Teacher Preparation*

Twenty minutes

### *Student Activities*

#### **Part I**

Two 50-minute sessions

#### **Part II**

Three 50-minute sessions

*Note: Part II cannot be completed until all materials have been gathered from the letter writing activity. This may take at least four weeks.*

## Materials

### *For the class:*

- Large wall map of California with legend
- Reference books on fruits and vegetables (optional)

### *For each partnership:*

- *Agricultural Distribution Process* (page 17)

## Background Information

Agriculture is an enormous industry in California and has a tremendous economic impact on our state. Agriculture commodity boards, councils, and commissions serve the growers and public in many ways. These groups provide facts and figures to the government, educate farmers and consumers about the commodity, and can provide a wealth of information to educators and students. Be aware that addresses for these organizations change and can be confirmed using the web sites. Your county Farm Bureau may also be a good resource. Refer to pages 37-41 for more information.

## Procedure

### **Part I**

1. **Introduce the lesson.** Explain to your students that they will be learning about California agriculture. They will become “experts” on one California commodity, write a report, and make an oral presentation to the class. Review the agricultural distribution process using the chart on page 17.
2. **Study a map of California.** Show the students a large wall map of California. Introduce the legend and brainstorm several things that can be learned from the map of California. Have students locate where they live and identify the nearest agricultural growing regions. Discuss the main topographical areas of California—the mountains, valleys, deserts, and coastal areas. Discuss what your students know about the climate, water, and soil of different regions and how this information can indicate an area’s agricultural capacity. Discuss that each commodity grown in California has unique needs and grows best in certain regions of California. Use the map template (page 16) as you see appropriate for your students. A useful commodity map can be viewed and downloaded from [www.cfaitc.org](http://www.cfaitc.org).
3. **Select an agricultural commodity to research.** Present the students with the list of California’s major agricultural commodities and the addresses of agricultural organizations (pages 37-41). In small groups of two or three, have students select an agricultural commodity for which they will become “experts.” Explain that they will teach their classmates about their commodities.



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## Materials *(continued)*

- *Map of California* (page 16)
- *California Major Agricultural Commodities* list (page 14)
- *Agricultural Organizations* list (pages 37-41)
- Two postage stamps and/or access to e-mail
- Letter writing materials
- *Sample Letter to Agricultural Commodity Board* (page 15)

4. **Write a business letter.** Have the students select one fruit or vegetable and write a formal business letter to an appropriate agricultural commodity board and/or farmer. Prior to writing the letter, students should prepare a list of things they wish to learn. Students may choose to write to more than one organization. A sample letter is provided on page 15.



Included in their requests may be questions related to:

- The production of the crop.
- The agricultural distribution of the crop (*how the crop gets from the farm to the table*).
- Growing locations and conditions.
- Uses of the crop.
- The nutritional value of the crop.
- The importance of the commodity to California's economy.

Students may also ask for:

- Informational brochures.
- Samples and/or pictures of the crop or product.

5. **Mail the letters.** Approve the letters before the envelopes are sealed. Mail the letters and wait for a reply. Many organizations have e-mail. Some students may wish to e-mail their letter once it is proofed.

## Part II

1. **Write a thank you letter.** Upon receipt of materials, have the students write and send thank you letters to the organizations that provided information. Be sure to have the students proof the rough drafts of their letters and have you review them, prior to sending the letters. Remind students to write legibly and use a proper letter format.
2. **Write a report on California agricultural commodity.** The information and materials received from the agricultural commodity board should be assembled into a written report and used in an oral presentation. The written report should be proofed for grammar, spelling, and organization before making a final copy which is written legibly and includes quotes or paraphrasing of information from various sources. Credit should be given to all references. The written report may include:

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## Content Standards

### Grade 4

#### Science

Life Sciences • 3b

#### Reading/Language Arts

Reading • 2.2, 2.5

Writing • 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4,  
1.5, 1.7, 1.10, 2.3

Written and Oral Language  
Conventions • 1.0

Listening and Speaking • 1.0,  
1.2, 1.5, 1.9, 2.2

### Grade 5

#### Science

Earth Sciences • 3c

#### Reading/Language Arts

Reading • 2.1

Writing • 1.0, 1.1, 1.3, 1.6

Written and Oral Language  
Conventions • 1.0

Listening and Speaking • 1.0,  
1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.2

### Grade 6

#### Science

Ecology 5e

#### Reading/Language Arts

Reading • 2.1

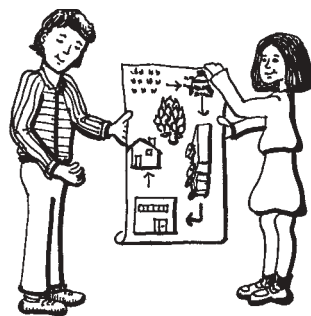
Writing • 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4,  
1.6, 2.3

Written and Oral Language  
Conventions • 1.0

Listening and Speaking • 1.0,  
1.4, 1.6, 2.2

- A map of California with crop-growing areas highlighted.
- A creative schematic drawing of how the commodity gets from the farm where it is grown to the table where it is eaten.
- Interesting facts and products.
- Nutritional information.
- Information about the importance of the crop to California's economy.
- Brochures and/or pictures.

3. **Make an oral presentation.** Have each group of students give a three to five minute "expert" oral presentation explaining what they have learned about agriculture in California and the specific commodity that they have researched. Encourage creative presentations which may include television commercials, plays, editorials, news reports, poems or interviews. Prior to the formal presentation, the students should practice their reports orally focusing on volume, pitch, and appropriate body gestures.



## Extensions

- Have students choose one of the crops studied and include it in one of their home meals. Have students write a paragraph about the food and send the paragraph to the organization that provided information.
- Ask students to create a mural that illustrates the basic steps of the agricultural distribution process.
- Have students write letters to the food service personnel at their school or district informing them about their study of California agriculture and the commodities that have been researched. Have students ask the staff to include these food items in a future menu.
- Have your students visit a farmers' market, the produce section of a local supermarket, or a local produce vendor. Observe how California crops are marketed.
- Have a special snack day where students taste the foods described in the presentations.
- Design a quiz game to teach the class about various commodities. Create questions from the literature obtained from written inquiries.

# California's Major Agricultural Commodities \*

In 2001, the leading California commodities were:

1. Milk and Cream .....	\$3,630,171,000
2. Grapes .....	2,650,873,000
3. Nursery Products .....	2,087,447,000
4. Lettuce .....	1,370,004,000
5. Cattle and Calves .....	1,351,500,000
6. Hay .....	1,020,510,000
7. Flowers and Foliage .....	998,459,000
8. Strawberries .....	841,031,000
9. Tomatoes .....	766,260,000
10. Almonds .....	731,880,000



\* 2001 statistics provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service; [www.nass.usda.ca.gov/agcomm](http://www.nass.usda.ca.gov/agcomm).

# Sample Letter to Agricultural Commodity Board

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Student(s) Name  
School Name  
School Address  
School Phone Number

Date

Mr. Robert Apple  
Fresh Valley Fruits  
3001 Produce Circle  
Pleasant Grove, CA 90132

Dear Mr. Apple:

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ grade student at \_\_\_\_\_ School. My class is studying California agriculture and I am learning about \_\_\_\_\_.

I would like to know where \_\_\_\_\_ grow(s) in California and the conditions required for its growth. I would like to know how \_\_\_\_\_ gets from the farms to the stores. I would also like to know about all the uses of \_\_\_\_\_, the nutritional value of \_\_\_\_\_ and the importance of \_\_\_\_\_ to California's economy. If you have any informational brochures, samples of \_\_\_\_\_, or products made from \_\_\_\_\_, I would like you to send them to me.

If possible, I would like you to send me this information by \_\_\_\_\_. I am going to write a report and make an oral presentation to my class and I would appreciate the information as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

*Note: This is a sample letter. All students should write their own letters using their own words and styles.*

# Map of California



# Agricultural Distribution Process

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