



# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Students at Santa Ana College Explore Careers in Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Thanks to \$290,000 USDA Grant *Hundreds of Area Students Exposed to High-Demand Jobs***

(Santa Ana)—With jobs in short supply, what students wouldn't want to learn about a field with 50,000 openings each year for new college graduates? What if these jobs were available in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-related industries and those students live in an urban setting like Santa Ana, CA?

Over the last three years, 900 Santa Ana College (SAC) students have been exposed to USDA-related educational opportunities and careers through career panels, field trips and presentations. These activities were part of the "Partnership for Transfer Success in USDA Career Majors" program.

Santa Ana College has been awarded two consecutive grants to underwrite this program. The first grant of \$275,000 over three years came in 2007 and the second three-year grant of \$290,000 was received in July 2010. The funding was provided by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hispanic-serving institutions grant program. SAC was one of 25 colleges and universities nationwide to be selected as a 2010 grant recipient, eight are in California. SAC is the only grant recipient in Orange County.

"The careers our students are exposed to are much more diverse than you would think," said Martha Vargas, SAC Transfer Center Coordinator and project director. "They include fashion design, wildlife biology, forestry, nutrition, environmental ecology, food science engineering, and more."

The program offered career panels and field trips to Cal Poly Pomona, University of California, Irvine (UCI), and local agricultural/environmental agencies to the general student population. In addition, a total of 40 students were recruited for a cohort program. These students received the following support:

- Each student met with the program counselor once a semester for help with an education and transfer plan, as well as referrals for additional support services.
- All cohort students enrolled in a transfer seminar designed specifically for them.
- Cohort network meetings were held two times each semester.
- Pending satisfactory progress in the program, each cohort student received \$600 annually for fees and books.

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- Students were placed in a 100-hour internship that prepared them for USDA-related careers. Upon completion, each received \$1,000 for tuition at their transfer institution.
- A \$25,000 scholarship was awarded to one outstanding student.

Twenty-one-year-old Garden Grove resident Nancy Santiago, who transferred this fall to UCI to study pharmacy, and 24-year-old Orange resident Santiago Salazar, who transferred to UC Santa Cruz to study marine biology and developmental biology, are enthusiastic about the program.

“One awesome thing was attending the MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences) Conference in Florida; everything was completely paid for,” said Salazar. “It was terrific seeing how much private industry wanted us to work for them.”

In addition, he related how meaningful his internship at the Irvine Ranch Conservancy was to him. But overall, what he found most motivational were the relationships he developed with his mentors and the students in the program. “We all pushed each other to do better,” he recalled.

For Nancy Santiago, a single mother, her internship with WIC, a federally-funded health and nutrition program for women, infants, and children, was especially meaningful. With WIC, she helped give nutrition classes to other mothers. “I learned how to make healthier meals. It meant a lot to help because I also get assistance through WIC myself,” she said.

The second grant will allow the college to expand its outreach to students in the Santa Ana Unified School District. A unit on agriculturally-related career fields will be taught to approximately 2,500 high school students. Those high school students preparing for admission to SAC will be invited to join USDA-centered learning communities, as will current SAC students. The learning community students will enroll in “College Composition” and “Career Exploration in USDA-related Fields”

Once again, the college will recruit a cohort of 40 students, who will receive similar support as those in the first grant period. To help retain students in the program, recent SAC transfers to local universities in related majors will be recruited to participate in a two-part mentoring program. The transfer students will receive mentoring from professionals in the fields of nutrition and other USDA-related fields. The following year, the students will mentor SAC students as they prepare for transfer. The grant provides \$500 stipends to the cohort students who complete an internship, \$250 to both mentors and mentees, as well as one \$40,000 scholarship to be awarded to one outstanding student to support the two years needed to earn a bachelor’s degree after transferring from SAC.

**About the Rancho Santiago Community College District**

*The mission of the Rancho Santiago Community College District (RSCCD) is to respond to the educational needs of an ever-changing community and to provide programs and services that reflect academic excellence. Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College are public community colleges of RSCCD, which serve the residents of Anaheim Hills, East Garden Grove, Irvine, Orange, Santa Ana, Tustin and Villa Park. Both colleges provide education for academic transfer and careers, courses for personal and professional development, customized training for business and industry, and programs to train nurses, firefighters and law enforcement personnel.*

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