



2024 Florida Farm to School Essay Contest

Winner: Third Place

Prompt: Letter to a Farmer

Dear Mr. Estes,

I am writing to thank you for your invaluable efforts in ensuring the sustainability of Florida's renowned citrus industry. It is so inspiring to see a grower committed to keeping fresh, healthy produce available to community, in spite of battling widespread citrus diseases like citrus greening and canker. By closely working with local agrochemical researchers, including myself, you are helping preserve a vital industry and the food traditions our community cherishes, like fresh orange juice or delicious homemade key lime pie.

Your contributions go far beyond just the economy; they are about supporting a healthy way of life. When citrus crops suffer, so does our community's access to affordable and nutritious food sources of Vitamin C. Your efforts to tackle citrus diseases protect not only the trees, but also our local health and the lively neighborhood markets that rely on quality products.

One of the things I admire most about you is your willingness to partner with researchers – especially the next generation of researchers. As a high school student, I often face the challenge of not being taken seriously in a field dominated by professionals, but you have shown me – and others like me – that age is not a barrier to making some sort of meaningful contribution. Your belief in the potential of youth researchers helps foster our curiosity and innovation skills early on. For me, it was so meaningful when you allowed me to test my formulation to combat citrus greening in your grove. After nearly two years of in-vitro lab testing, I sought a place to apply my work in the real-world, and you gave me that opportunity. Seeing something I had worked on and continuously optimized finally evaluated in the field was truly eye-opening, and could not have been possible without your eager support.

Opening parts of your grove as a testing ground for experimental formulations allows students to bring science out of the classroom and into real life. During our collaborations, you emphasize the importance of practical considerations in the field by teaching me the fundamentals of translational research. For example, a formulation should be easy to

assemble on the grower's end, be fully soluble, and have a suitable liquid consistency for trunk injections or foliar applications. It became so clear to me why many lab-developed solutions fail since they overlook real-world challenges in large-scale use. Thank you for helping me and other students understand how to bridge these gaps and make research more applicable.

This reflects your belief in promoting agricultural sustainability on top of supporting youth-driven research. Your willingness to mentor and support students shows us the impact of teamwork across all levels in tackling big challenges.

To reiterate, by supporting research and innovation in the fight against citrus diseases, you are helping secure a future where steady supplies of healthy produce, which is essential to local businesses, schools, and families, is abundant. The availability of fresh citrus will provide our community, and places all around the world, with the nutrients needed for a balanced diet.

Lastly, I want to recognize your impact in terms of local job opportunities. From field workers and harvesters to processing plant staff and transportation teams, there are countless families who depend on the citrus industry. It is known that Florida citrus growers such as yourself support nearly 30,000 jobs for agricultural workers throughout the state!

Thank you, Mr. Estes, for your contributions to our local community, unwavering support for youth researchers, and commitment to the future of Florida's citrus industry.

Sincerely,
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