



# Alex's Story

By Linda Rerini, Editor, *Dinuba Sentinel*

**A**lex Elizondo joined Dinuba High's FFA Chapter as a freshman and took a "liking to it," he said. A short year later, Alex was recognized by the Dinuba Unified Board of Trustees for his accomplishments on campus, which include growing food for the district's food services. Alex is only 15. He's also a very busy fellow.

He's on campus at 6 a.m. each school day to work in the Dinuba High FFA department before the first bell rings at 7:50 a.m. After school he can be found back in the FFA department, where he is the groundskeeper. He maintains the raised beds, where he grows tomatoes and peppers and has just planted lettuce for the winter season. He also cares for the bare root landscape trees and ornamental plants in the nursery and grows plants in the campus greenhouse. He just got a flat of Lamb's Ear to cultivate and he's caring for other plants that will be sold to the public at an FFA tree and plant sale coming up in November.

Kelly Martin, director of nutrition service for Dinuba Unified, singled out Alex for recognition at a board of trustees meeting earlier this month. She said Alex took advantage of the opportunities offered him.

As an FFA member, Alex was encouraged by Ag department teacher Tom Henderson to tackle a Supervised Agriculture Experience project. One of Alex's first SAE projects as a freshman was to build an arbor. He got a loan from his grandfather to buy the supplies to build the arbor then he sold it to an individual in Visalia for \$150. Making

money on his projects is just one reason Alex says he likes FFA. He said he also enjoys "hanging out with friends, going to meetings." Though he's just a sophomore, he's serving this year as an FFA officer. He's Sentinel for the chapter.

Alex rode his bike to campus all summer to work. He estimates he put in about 800 hours irrigating, watering and weeding his garden of tomatoes, peppers and watermelons and generally taking care of the FFA greenhouse and the ornamental trees. He has been able to sell the tomatoes and peppers he grew to the school district. Martin brought him a sample of the salsa that was prepared with the produce.

Alex also raised a hog that he recently showed at the Tulare County Fair. That animal sold for \$950. He's said he wants to work up from hogs to a steer by his senior year. He's saving the money he makes for college. Last spring at the annual FFA banquet, Alex was awarded the Star Greenhand award for being an outstanding first-year member.

As a teacher, Henderson has seen tremendous growth in Alex, who he said knew nothing about agriculture when he came to Dinuba High as a freshman. "I just see him growing more and more every month because he keeps on challenging himself," said Henderson. By the time he goes on to college, said Henderson, Alex will be "a very strong agriculturist." Asked about his career plans, Alex said, "I want to become an Ag teacher."