

EXPOSURE



A NOURISHING COMMITMENT

Life on the farm: Makayla Toste

Story by [Fresno State](#)

January 22nd, 2019

It's 4:30 a.m. on a foggy December morning at Fresno State. While most students are catching up on sleep after finals week, Makayla Toste is at the University's Dairy Unit, tending to over 420 Holstein and Jersey cows, heifers and calves.

"Cows milk 365 days a year," Makayla says. "They have to be fed 365 days a year. Even though we might be on winter break, I still have to be here and we still have to tend to the cows."

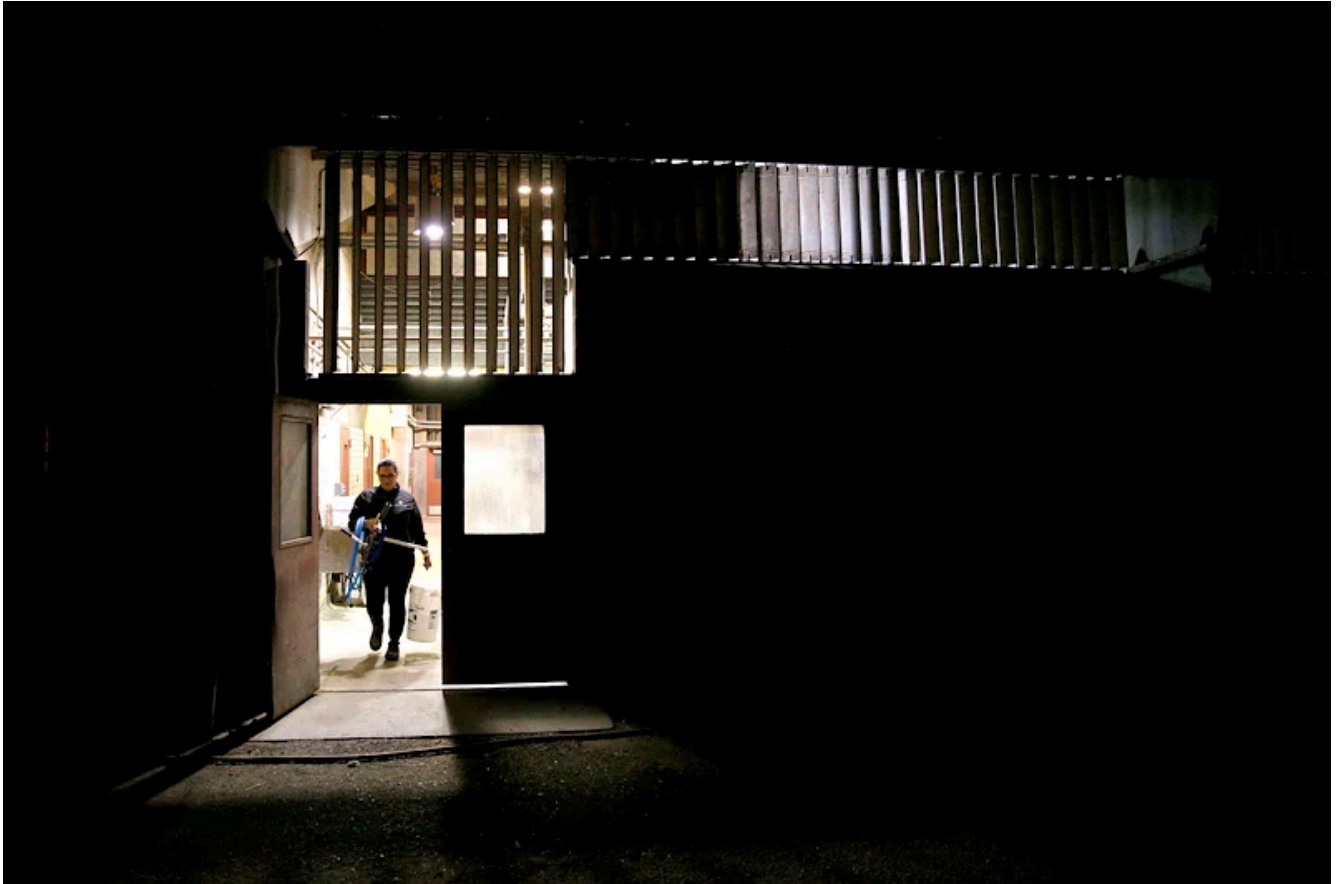
Makayla's job as Fresno State's dairy student herdsman is virtually a 24/7 commitment. A

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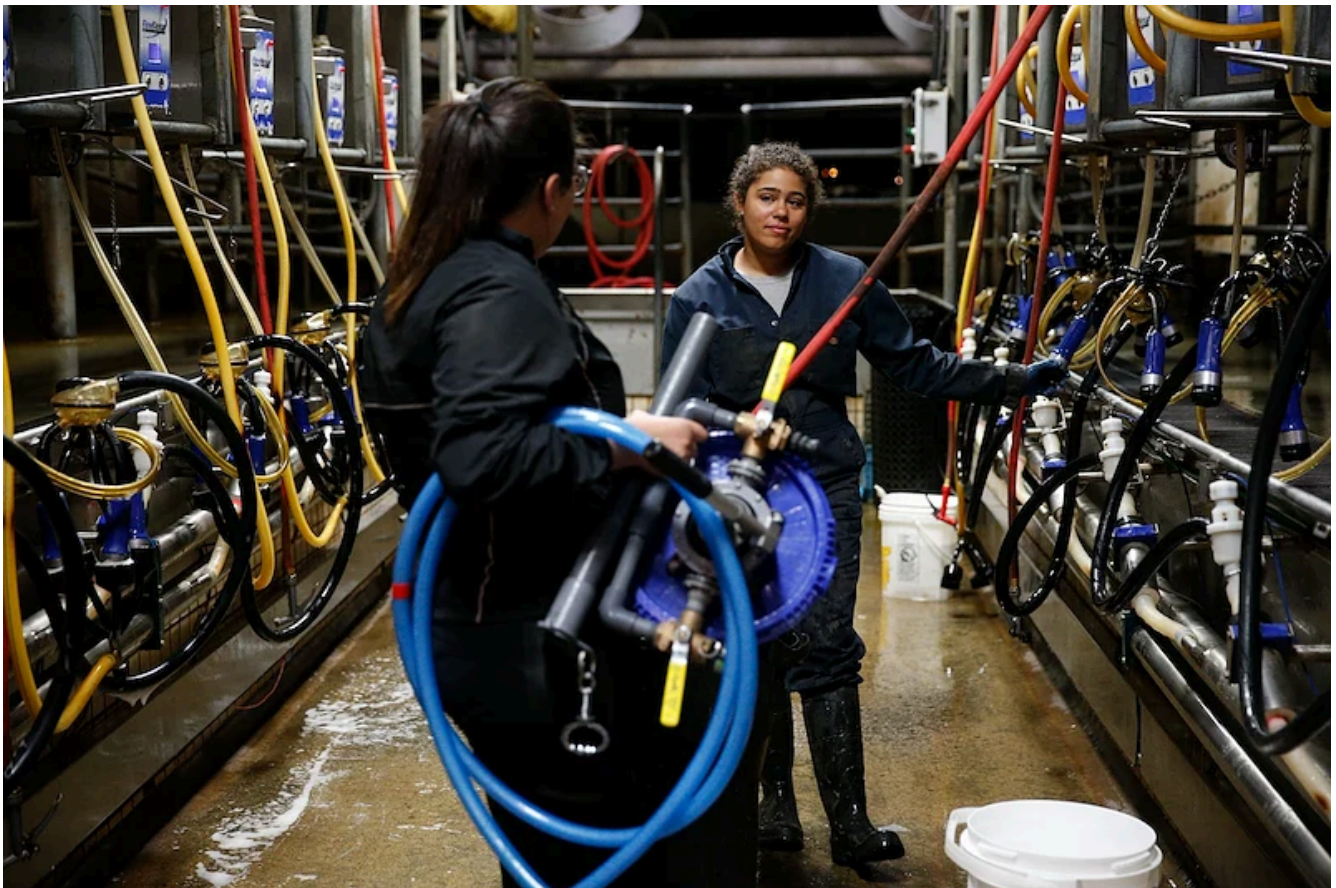
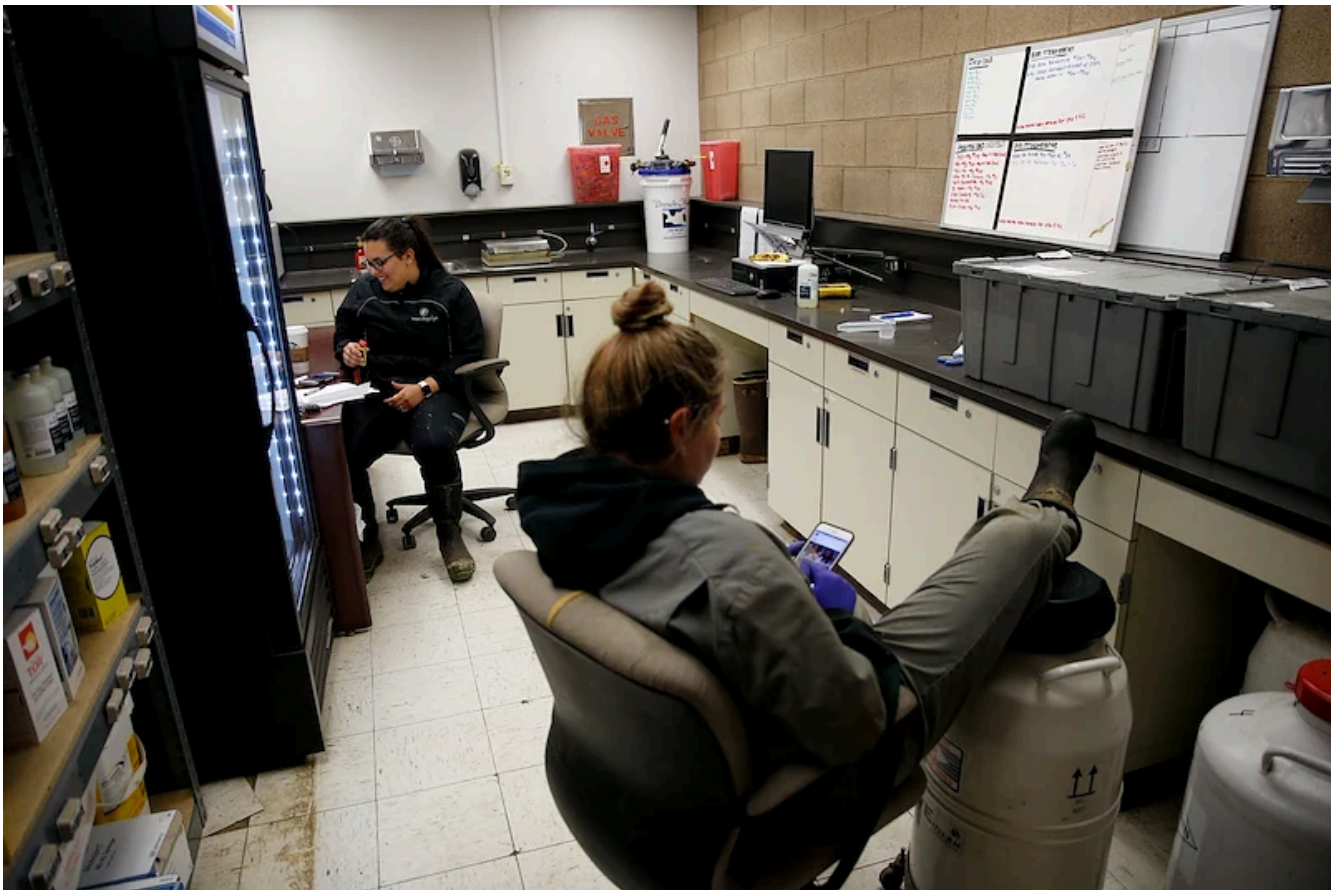
managing over 20 student employees.

An average day for her starts bright and early, at 4:30 a.m., as other student employees finish the 1:30 a.m. shift.

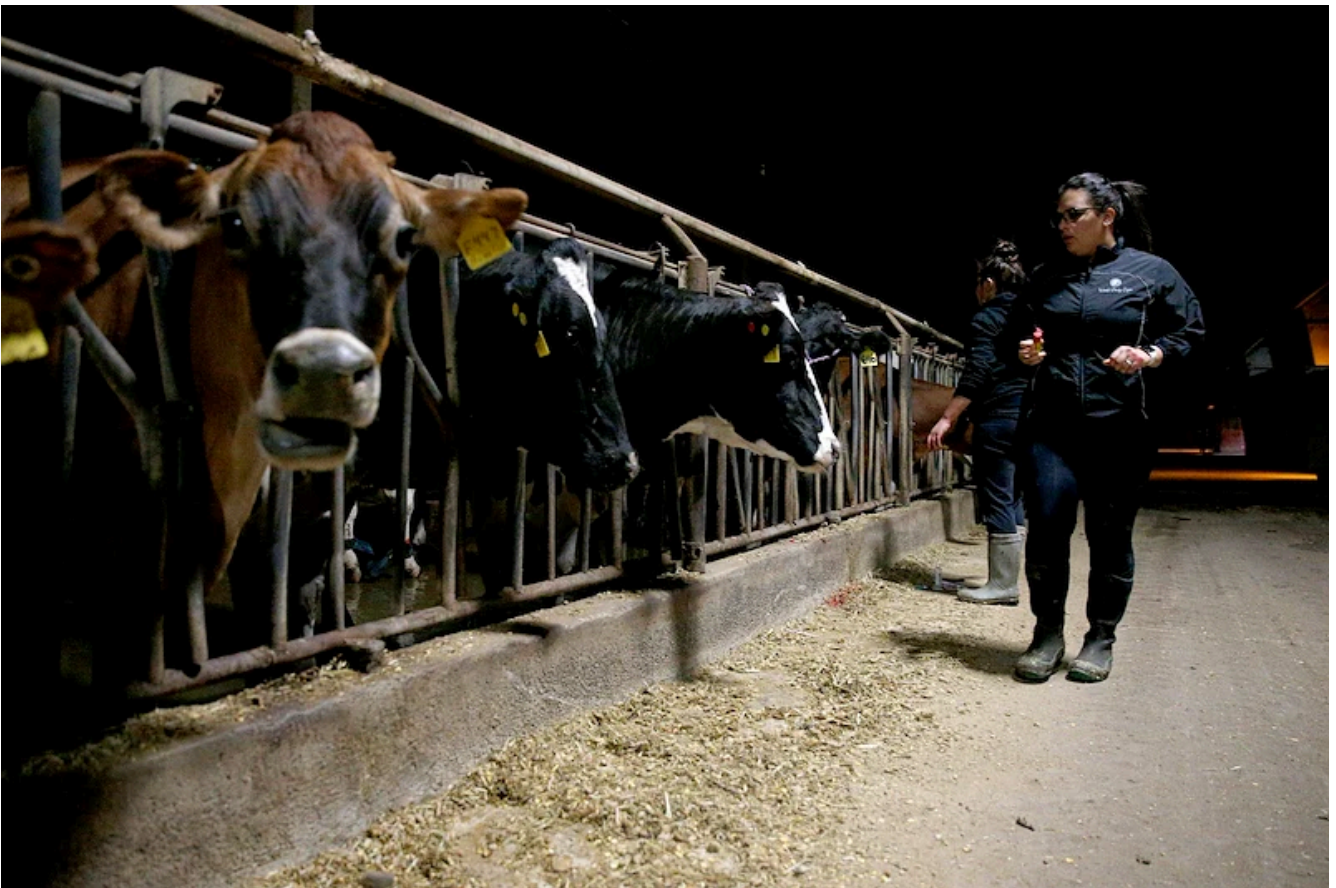
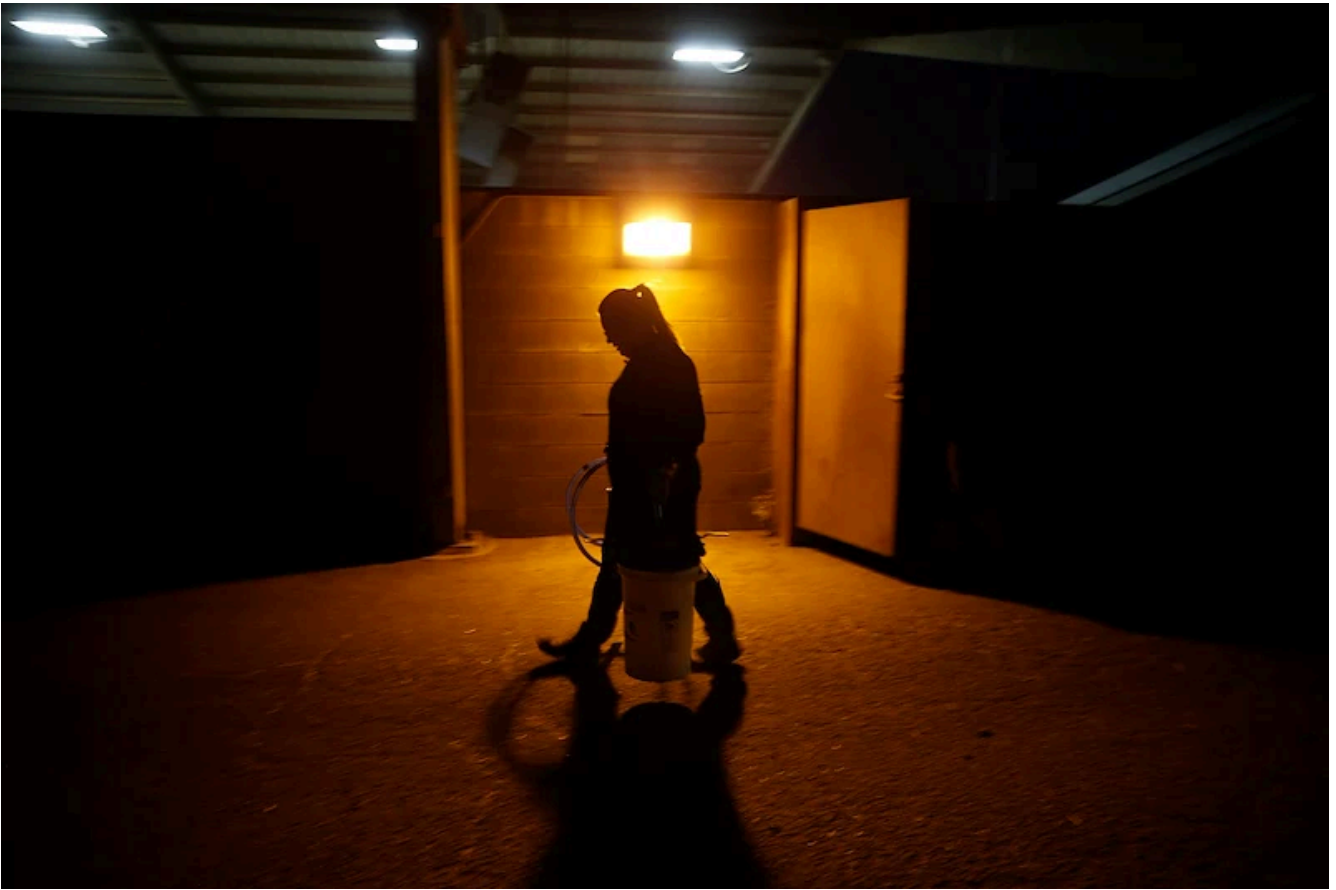
The middle of the day is usually reserved for class and assignments. Soon after, she is back at the dairy, checking on the herd, overseeing operational finances and working with her student employees.



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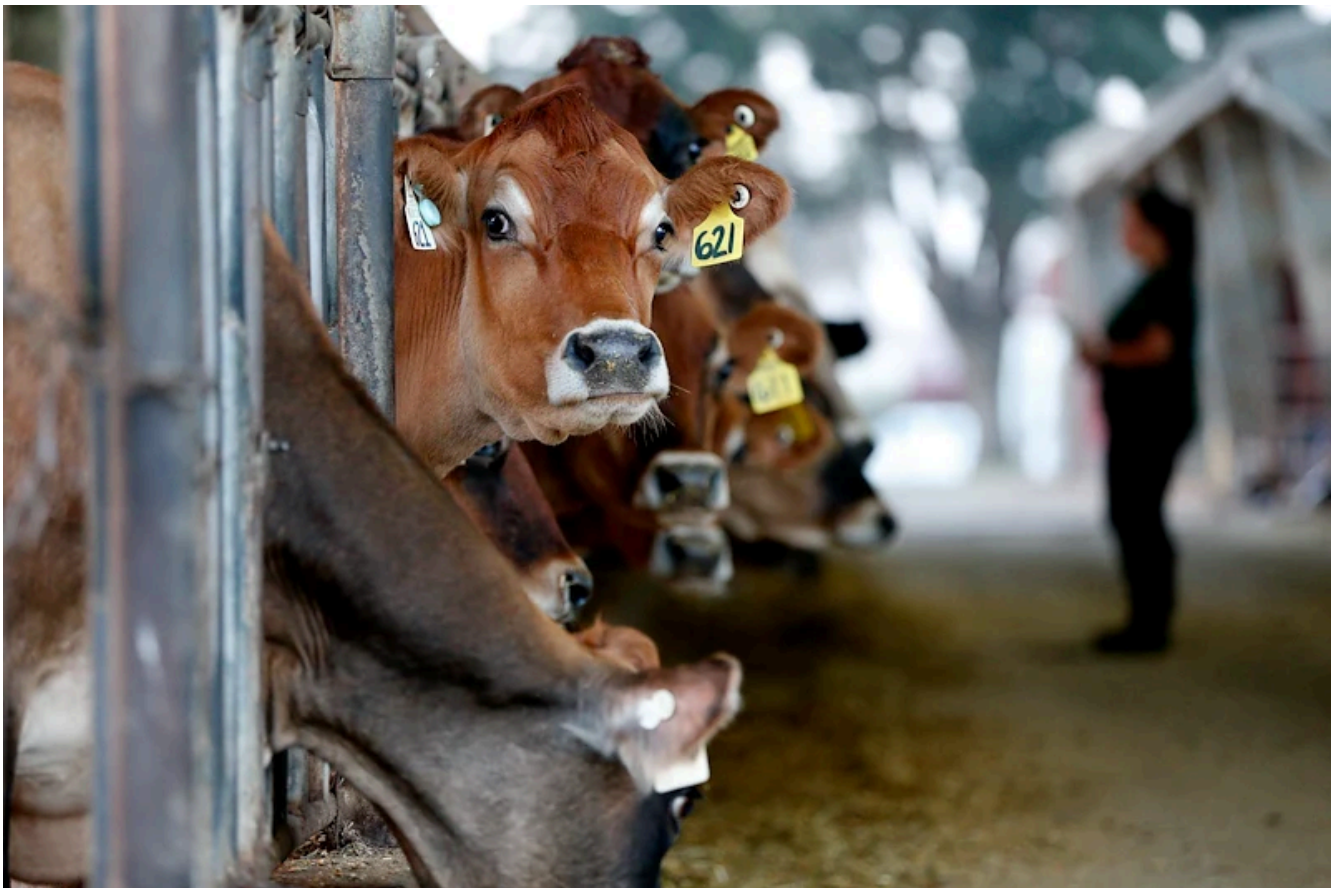
⇒ **Did you know? The Fresno State Dairy Unit is one of the few collegiate dairies run entirely by students.**

Dr. Kyle Thompson, dairy science program coordinator, says the hands-on experience Makayla and her student employees are getting is invaluable.

“This facility is 100 percent student run,” he says. “Students can take their knowledge beyond the classroom and actually get a job at the Dairy Unit — learn how to manage and work and milk cows, and take care of the health of the herd as well.”



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MORE THAN A DAIRY

What makes Fresno State's Dairy Unit particularly unique is its modern technology, Makayla says. The cows' smart neck collars are similar to human activity trackers, like Fitbit. They detect their rumination, temperature and whether they are in estrus.

"We are able to use these tools, as well as our new diagnostic lab, to teach students things they will not learn in a book," she says.

The diagnostic equipment and modern technology are a result of donor support.

Makayla is also an officer in Fresno State's Dairy Club, which meets for educational activities, shows and sales that promote the dairy industry. Dr. Thompson says the Dairy Unit is involved in an array of extracurricular activities, such as intercollegiate dairy competition, dairy judging and outreach with youth.

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“Makayla has been very crucial to push all that through,” he says. “She will take her own time to travel to county fairs and even state fairs to interact with those kids, just to say, ‘hey, Fresno State’s here and if you need help, we’re here to help you.’”

⇒ Did you know? The Dairy Unit is one of 22 enterprises at the University Agricultural Laboratory (campus farm).



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IN HER BLOOD

Agriculture is in Makayla's blood.

Her parents immigrated to the United States from the Azores and her father went straight into dairy farming. She recalls working on his farm while growing up in Newman, California.

By age 11, she joined 4-H, a nation-wide youth program where kids complete projects in agriculture, science, health and citizenship. Shortly after, she joined Future Farmers of America, which develops students' leadership skills through agricultural education.

⇒ **Did you know? California's dairy industry is the largest in the nation.**

The first in her family to attend college, Makayla studied dairy science at Modesto Junior College before transferring to Fresno State.

"I'm fortunate to be at Fresno State," she says. "I came to Fresno State with the intention of making a difference, and I wanted to do that at the Dairy Unit because that's something I'm really passionate about."

Makayla adds,

"I'm planning on taking my ag education with me throughout my career, throughout the rest of my life."



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Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Esra Hashem — University Brand Strategy and Marketing*

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