So Many Decisions to Make

Written by Helen de la Maza

California Education and the Environment Initiative
History-Social Science Standards 3.5.1., 3.5.2., and 3.5.3.

Hola! Me llamo Juana Aldea. I live in California, just like you. It is a beautiful place!

I have always wanted to be a grape farmer.
I have been working hard and studying farming.
I have been saving money for a long time. I finally have enough money to buy some land, some plants, and other things I will need. I will also be able to hire workers to help me on my farm.

Thanks for joining me on my *aventura* or adventure!

☞ *Go to page 2.*

I have not decided where to buy land in the state. You can help me with this decision!

I know grapes need the right conditions to grow and survive. I want to grow “table grapes,” which are the kind people eat as fruit. The kind of table grapes I want to grow are called Thompson

Seedless grapes. They grow best in a place with hot, dry summers, and cool, wet winters. They grow well on flat ground or on small hills. The vines need water to produce grapes, but not too much of it.

Where, oh where in California should I start my farm?

Here are two places I have been thinking about to buy land for my farm:

1. Fresno County. This county is in the middle of a big valley. In Fresno County, the summers are hot. Rain falls between October and May. The winters are cool, but not too cold!

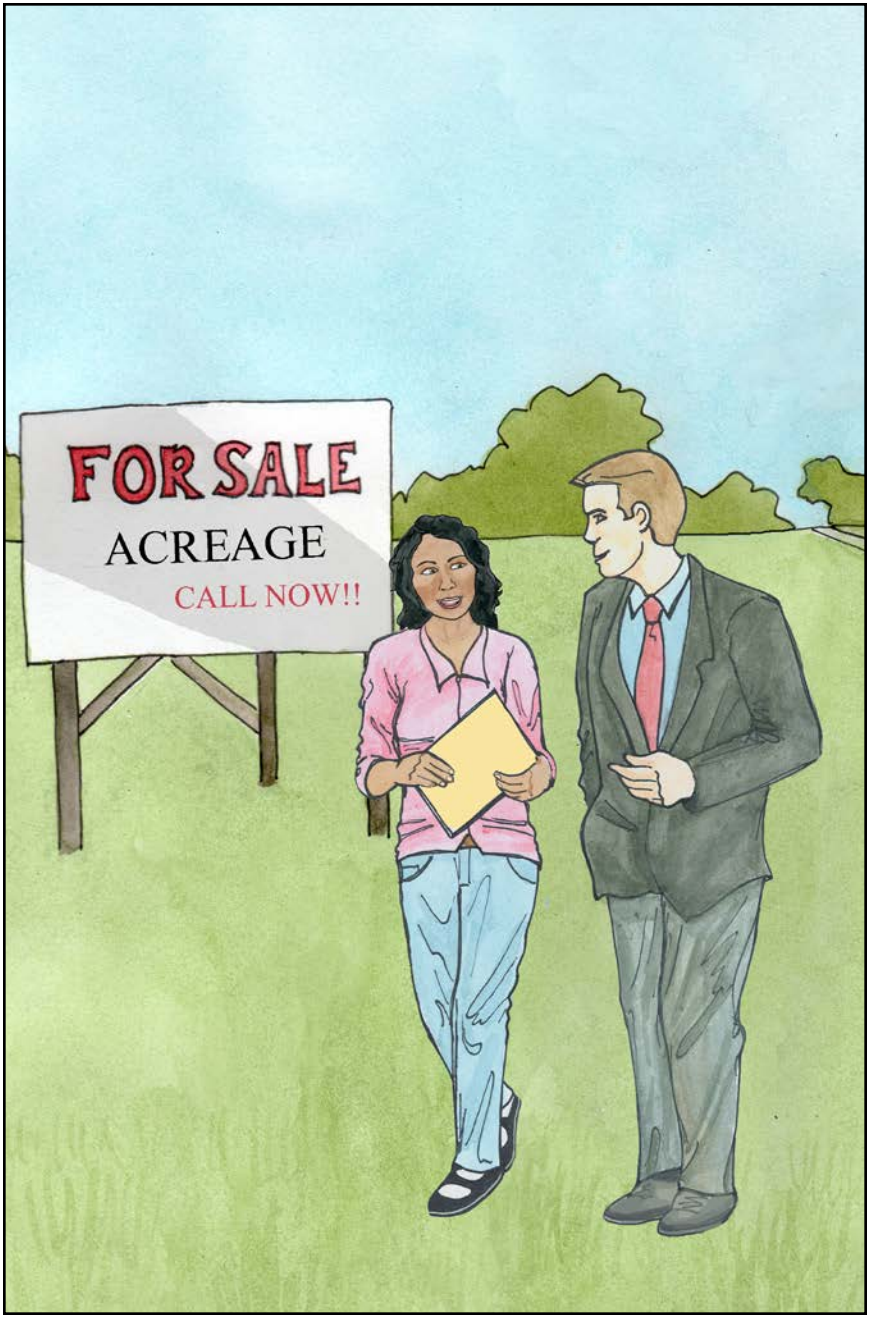
2. Alpine County. This county is in tall mountains. It snows in the winter. In the summer, at night, it can be very cold. During the day it is warm.

Raise your hand if you think I should buy land in Fresno County.

Raise your hand if you think I should buy land in Alpine County.

☞ *If you voted for Fresno County, go to page 4.*

☞ *If you voted for Alpine County, go to page 6.*


FOR SALE
ACREAGE
CALL NOW!!

It looks like I will be buying land in Fresno County!

Wow! I am driving through Fresno County and there are farms everywhere! I think we made a great choice!

I just saw a sign on an empty field that says "For Sale." What luck! I am going to drive into this farm and talk to the owner.

Guess what? I am now the proud owner of this beautiful farmland! I am so excited! I can begin to plant my grapes very soon!

That means it is time to make more decisions. I have a lot of planning to do before I start planting the grapes.

☞ *Go to page 8.*

Thanks for helping me decide to buy land in Alpine County!

Driving through Alpine County, I am not seeing any farms. Hmm, I wonder if it is because the mountains are steep, and the air is cool, even though it is the middle of summer.

Here is the post office on the main street. Come inside with me to talk to some of the people that live here.

“Hello! My name is Juana Aldea, and I am interested in buying some land here to start a grape farm. Do you know of any farmland for sale near here?”

“Ma’am, welcome to Alpine! Grape farming, eh? I do not know much about grapes. It snows a lot here in the winter and it is very cold. Can grapes handle that?”

“Hmmm… grape plants do not like snowy winters. Are there farms in this county at all?”

“Well, some people have gardens, but most of the land here is public land. If you started a farm, it would have to be very small.”

“Thanks, Sir. I think you just helped me realize that Alpine County may not be the best place to grow grapes!”

☞ *Return to page 4.*

I know grapes need water to grow.

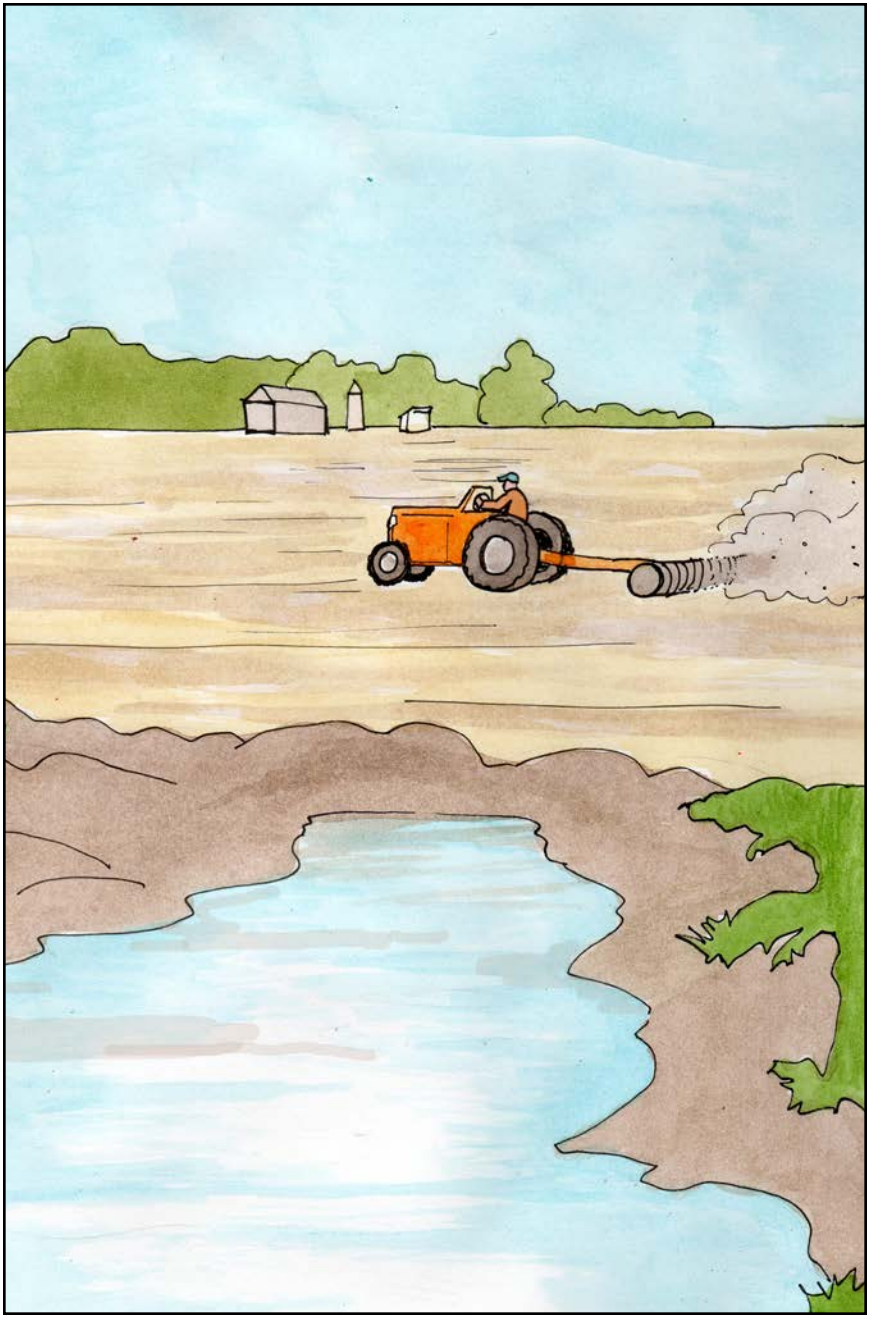
When I was talking to the person who sold me the land, he said I have two choices. I can buy water from the county and have it brought in through pipes. Or I can do my best to find water on my new land and pay to dig a well to reach water underground.

Raise your hand if you think I should buy water from the county.

Raise your hand if you think I should try to find water on my land and dig a well.

☞ *If you voted to buy water from the county, go to page 10.*

☞ *If you voted to dig a well, go to page 12.*



Looks like I will be buying water from the county!

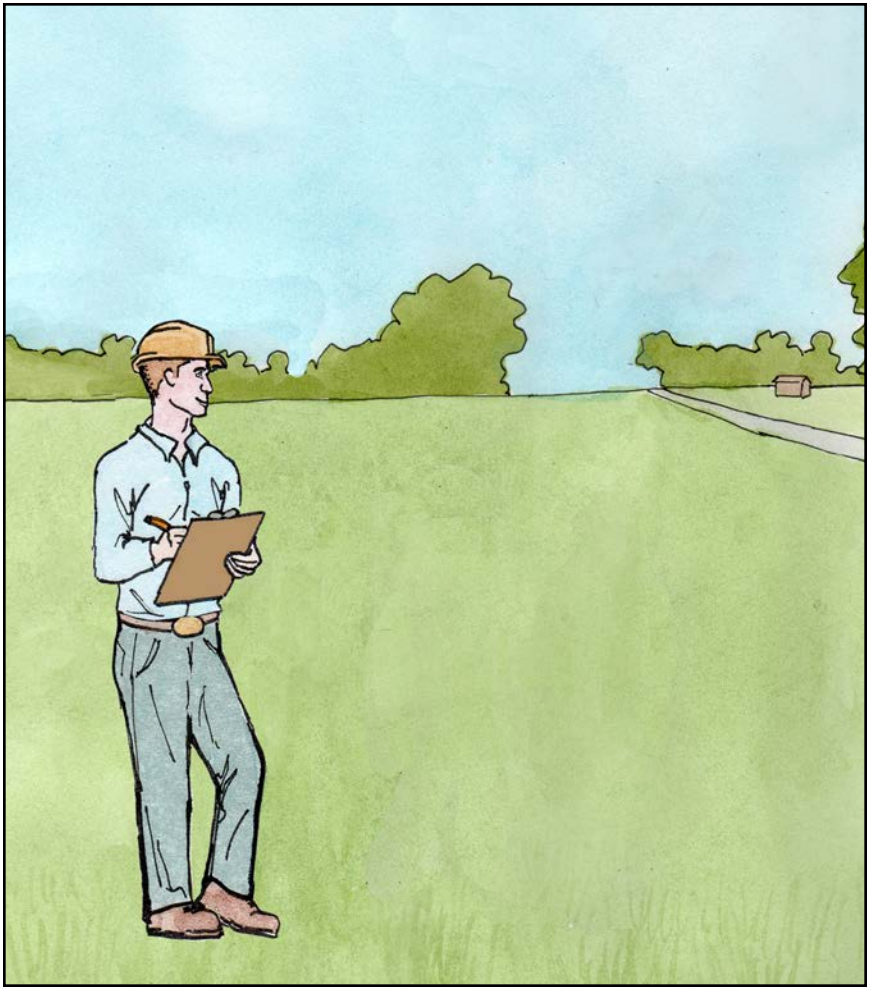
I will need to call the Water Authority to find out how much it will cost. I also need to hire someone to put in the pipes.

I do know that it does not rain a lot here. I have to be very careful about using water so I do not waste any or use too much.

I also need to be careful about the water running off my land. I do not want to let it flow onto my neighbor's farm or even into the river down the way. If I do, I will get in trouble.

I will talk to my friend about what I can do to carefully use the water I buy.

☞ *Go to page 14.*



I am going to look for water on my property.
This is going to be another *aventura*!

I have hired a person to help me find out if there is water underground on the land I bought. If there is, he has a friend who owns a company that digs wells and will give me a good deal. He has been walking all around my land using special equipment to find water.

“Well, what have you found out? Where do you think my well should be?”

“Sorry, Juana, I have been all over your property. You do not have enough water underground on your land to use on your farm. Not many of your neighbors do either.”

“Will I have to buy water from the county to use on my farm?”

“Yes, but the county gives the farmers a good deal on their water because agriculture is a big part of our economy.”

“Oh! That is wonderful! It is too bad I do not have my own water, but at least I can buy some. Thank you for all your help!”

☞ *Return to page 10.*

Now, I need to buy the grape vines that I will grow on my farm.

I cannot start by planting grape seeds. Instead, I will buy vines that are already two years old. They should grow fruit soon.

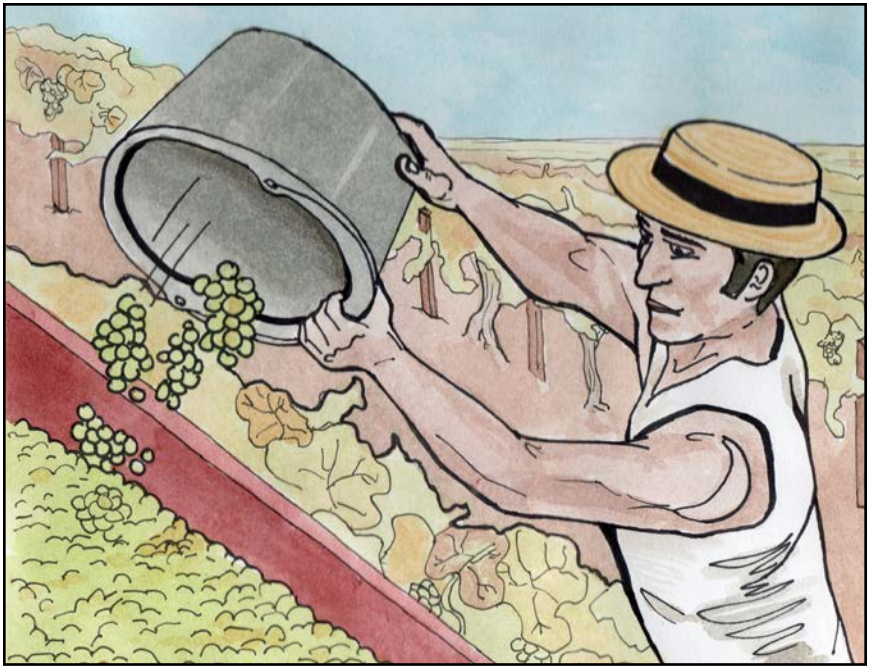
I will be spending a lot of money at this point. I need to buy around 6,000 grape plants!

The grape vines need to be planted in the winter. First, I have to build long lines of trellises—which are wires on posts—that the grape vines can lean on as they grow. I will need a lot of help building and putting up the trellises.

I need to cut back the vines a little bit in the winter. I will definitely need help with that!

The grape vines lose their leaves in the winter and just look like woody branches.

In the spring, the vines will flower. The flowers have to be pollinated by insects so they make fruit. I can buy my own beehives to keep on the farm, so that there are enough bees around to pollinate all the flowers on the grape vines. If I do, I will need help from someone who knows how to take care of the bees.

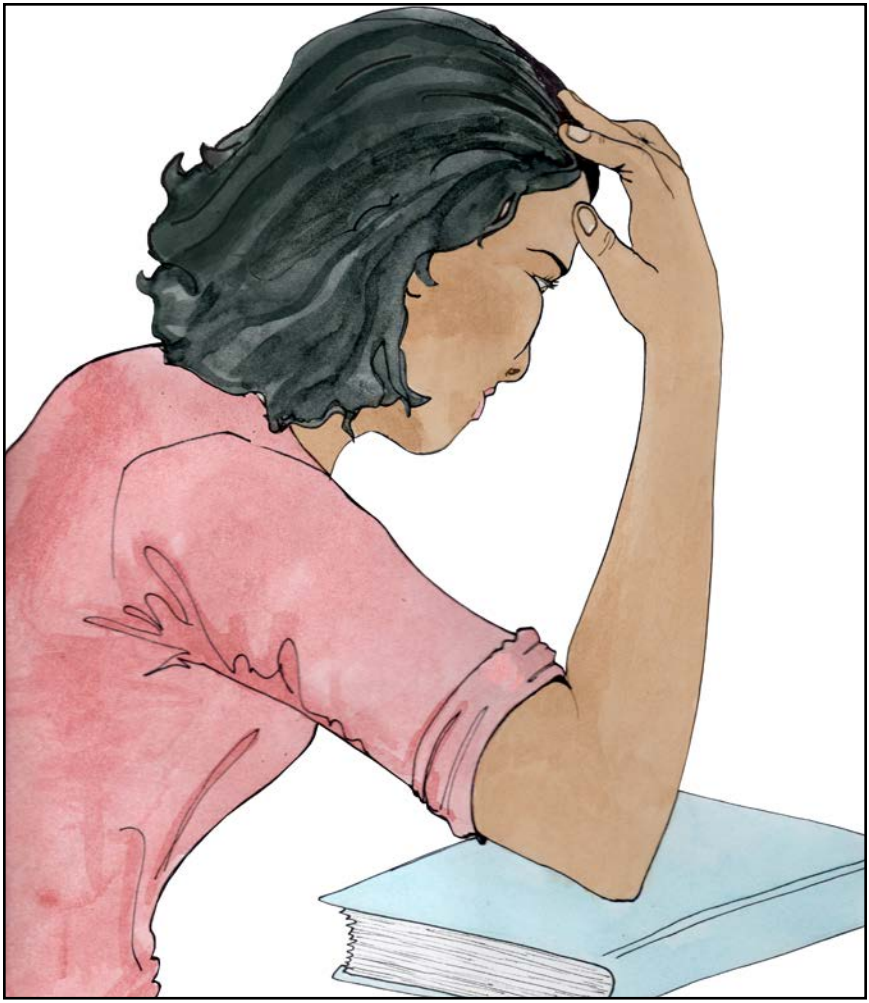


All summer long the grapes will grow and become sweeter and sweeter.

In the fall, I will be able to harvest my grapes! Table grapes are harvested by hand. If I wait too long to gather them, they can dry on the vine or become damaged by rain or frost. I will need many people to help with the harvest!

Now it is time to make decisions about the people I will hire to help me with the labor on my farm.

☞ *Go to the next page, page 16.*



I have a couple choices in hiring people to work on my farm.

I can hire people who live nearby. They would return to their own homes at night after working here during the day. This is a good choice because I would not have to give them a place to live. If there are not enough workers who live nearby, I will have to look for more people.

I could try to hire people from farther away. They would move here and live on my farm. I would have to build homes for them to stay in. Building these houses will cost me money, but then I will know I have enough people to work on the farm.

Raise your hand if you think I should hire local people to work on the farm.

Raise your hand if you think I should hire people from far away to work and live on the farm.

☞ *If you voted to hire local people to work on the farm, go to page 18.*

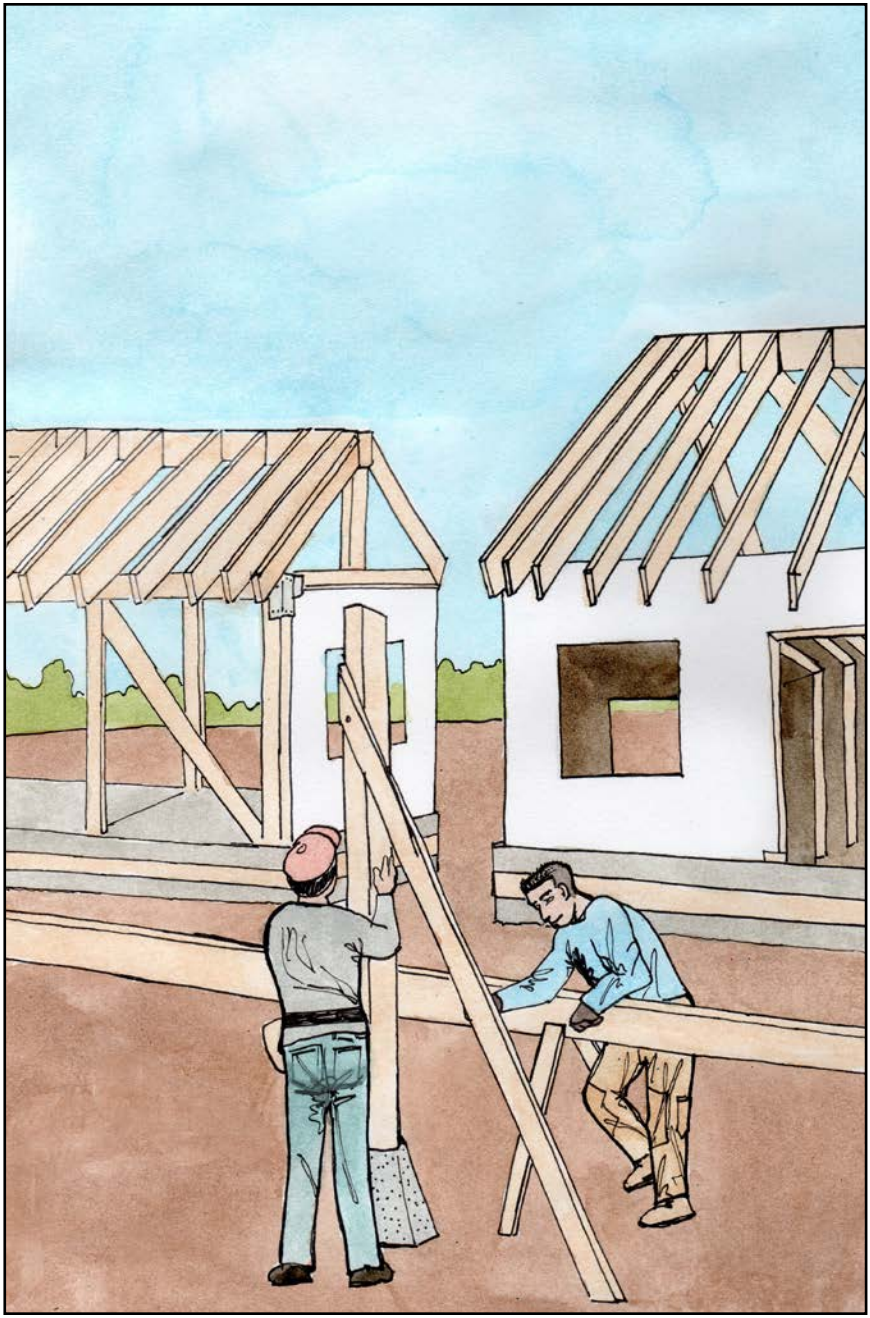
☞ *If you voted to hire people from far away to live and work on the farm, go to page 20.*

THE JOURNAL
WANT ADS
Grape farm workers
Call: Juana

Thank you for helping me decide to hire local people to work on my farm.

I need help right away since winter is coming. I want to buy my vines and get them in the soil before it begins to rain! I will put an advertisement in the local newspaper. I will also make posters to put up in the library, post office, and grocery stores.

☞ *Go to page 22.*



Thank you for helping me decide to hire people from far away to live and work on my farm.

I need to talk to a construction company to find out how much it will cost to build housing. I'm glad I had money saved. I still have some left over.

While they are building the houses, I will put advertisements in newspapers and on the Internet in other parts of the county to let people know I will be hiring soon. I hope the construction is finished before winter is over, so I can get the help I need to put the grape vines in the ground.

☞ *Turn to the next page, page 22.*

Another big decision I need to make is how to keep insects from hurting the grapes. Many farmers use chemicals called insecticides. These are pesticides that kill insects that can hurt the grapes. Some farmers use insects to control pests that will hurt the grapes.

I have a lot of questions about spraying chemicals. Do the chemicals get into the grapes? Can this hurt the people that buy and eat my grapes? Can the chemicals hurt me or the other people that work on my farm? How about the bees that I might use on the farm? Will the chemicals hurt them or make them go away?

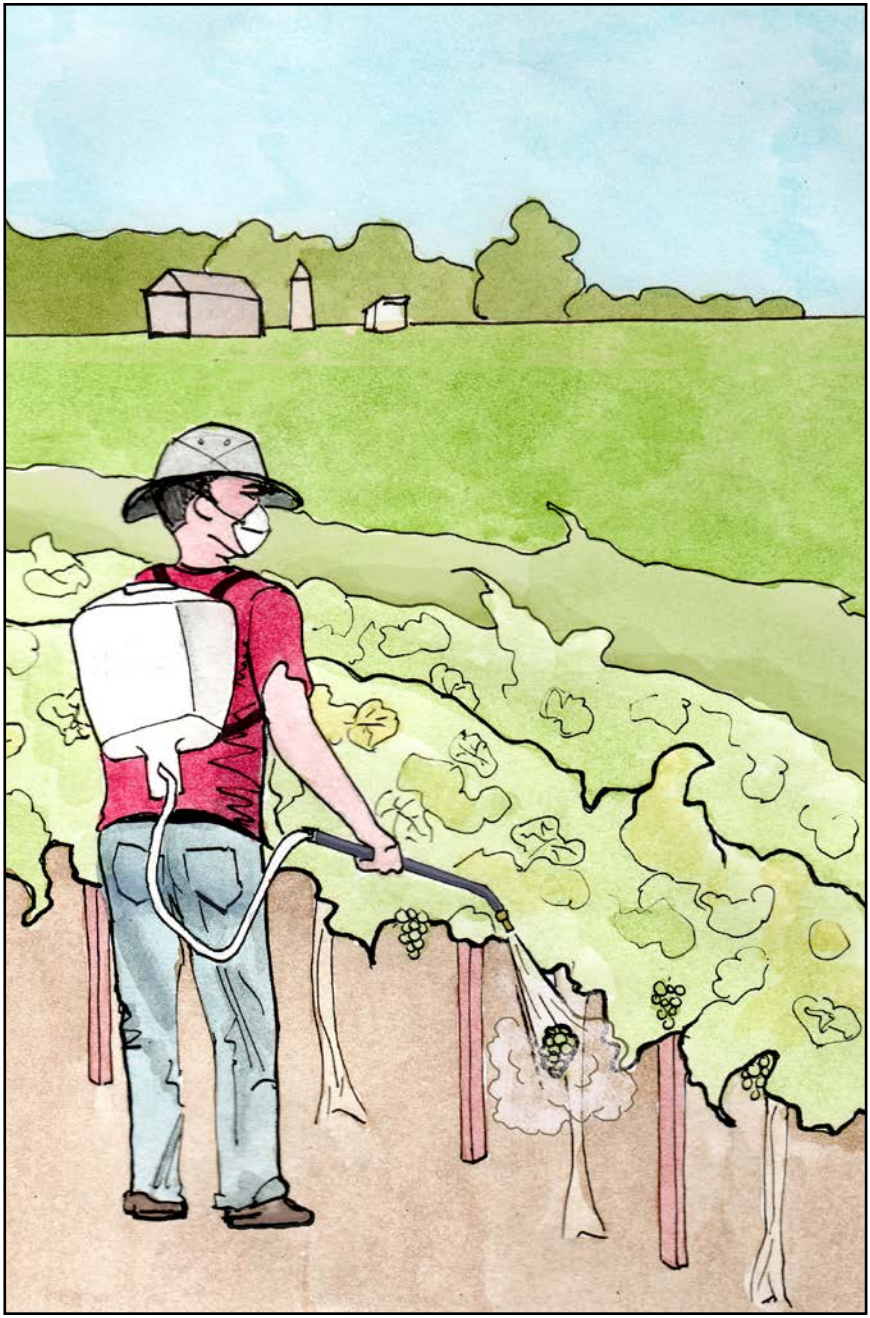
Wow, I have a lot more to learn about this!

Raise your hand if you want to learn more about using chemicals to protect the grapes on my farm.

Raise your hand if you want to learn more about using insects to protect the grapes on my farm.

☞ *If you voted to learn more about using chemicals, go to page 24.*

☞ *If you voted to learn more about using insects, go to page 26.*



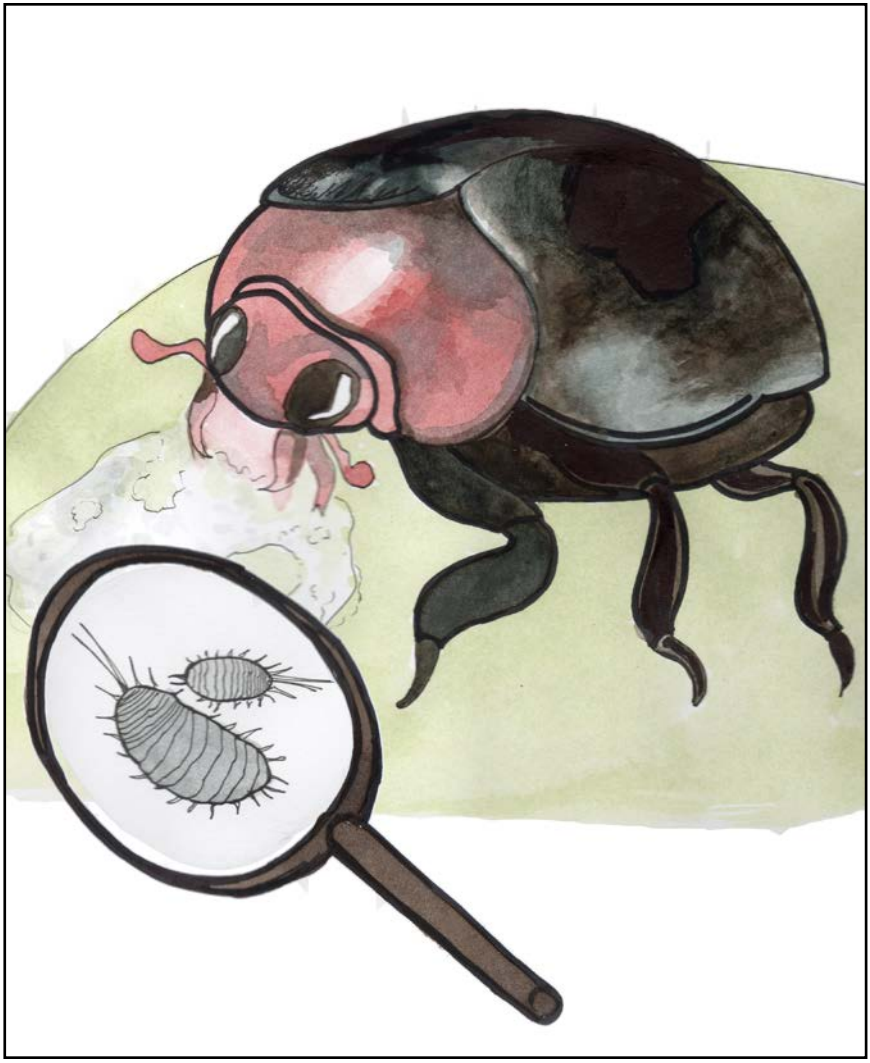
We have made the decision to use chemicals to protect the grapes on my farm from mealybugs.

This is a hard decision. It has both costs and benefits. Spraying chemicals on the grapevines may help me produce more grapes on my farm. But I will have to spend money to buy chemicals and the machines that spray them.

I will need to do more research. I need to learn which chemicals to use. I will also need to find out when to spray the plants and the ground, and how to spray!

For now, I will talk to some of the other farmers in this area. I will ask them what works and what is safe to use.

☞ *Go to page 28.*



We have decided to use insects instead of chemicals. They will help protect the grapes on my farm from mealybugs.

This was a hard decision. It has both costs and benefits. If I do not use chemicals, I may not be able to protect my grapes from insects and weeds. I could lose part of my crop. Still, I will not have to spend money buying the chemicals. Also, there will not be a chance of anyone getting sick from the chemicals that I use on the farm.

I have heard of farmers using ladybugs known as the “Mealybug Destroyers” to control mealybugs, aphids, and other pests. Maybe some of the farmers in this area are using insects. I will have to talk with them and find out what works.

Muchas gracias, for all of your help so far! I still have many things to do. But there are many decisions I have made about my business, thanks to you!

☞ *Go to the next page, page 28.*

As I mentioned already, I have been saving my money for a long time. I have been studying; and, I have been dreaming about the day when I would become a grape farmer.

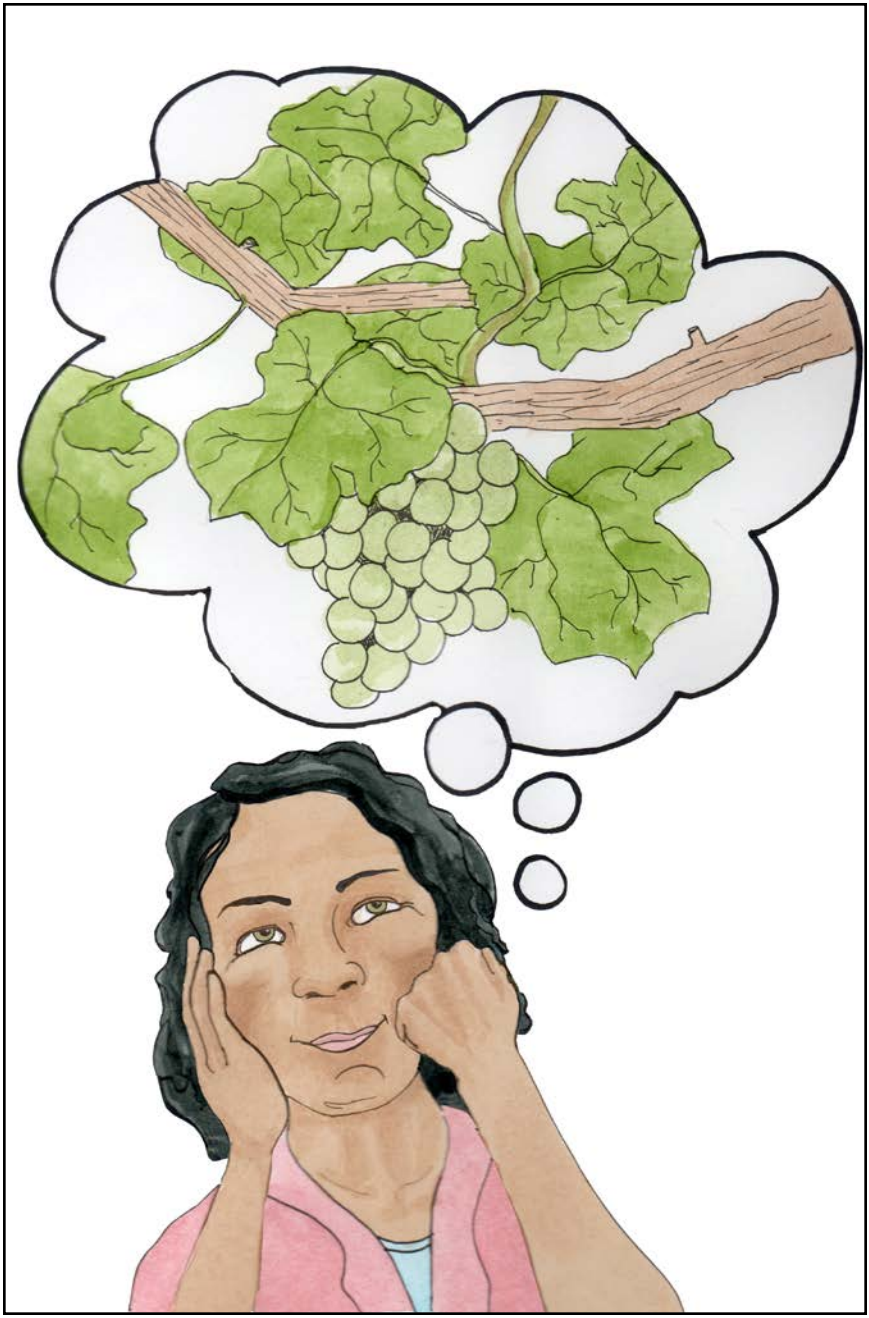
I used some of my *dinero* (money) to buy the land for my farm. You helped me decide where to buy the land.

With your help, I made decisions about where to get water for the grape plants, the people I will hire to help grow the grapes, and whether or not to use chemicals on my farm to protect my grapes.

I do need to make more decisions and spend more money on equipment for the farm. I will need a tractor, trellises, harvesting bins, and a few other things I do not know about yet!

For now, though, *vamos a tomar una siesta*; let's rest a while. We have made so many decisions already! I feel like I am off to a great start, *gracias a ustedes*; thanks to you!

I hope you can visit me on my farm some day and enjoy the sweet fruit from all of our labors.



Unit Title: **California's Economy: Natural Choices**
Grade: **3**

History–Social Science Standards 3.5.1., 3.5.2., and 3.5.3.
Supports ELA Standard: Writing 3.1.1.

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