ENRICHING AGRICULTURE

STUDENTS EXCEL WITH LATEST EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY. COWS STILL REQUIRED.

BY TERESA HENDRIX
A SALINAS VALLEY FARMER is helping Cal Poly agriculture students work with the latest equipment and technology.

Longtime Salinas Valley grower Arden John Oreggia passed away in late 2005. Though he wanted to, he never had the chance to go to college. He grew up on his family's dairy, served in the Army during World War II, and spent more than 60 years of his life growing produce on the Oreggia Ranch near Gonzales. He built a successful family business, John Oreggia & Co. and Oreggia Farms, and was a pioneer in introducing asparagus to the valley.

Near the end of his life, Oreggia toured the Cal Poly Creamery during Open House. He was struck by the can-do attitudes of the students and what they said about Cal Poly, explained friend and attorney Robert Taylor. In 2004, Oreggia donated $225,000 to the College of Agriculture to support the hiring of a full-time creamery manager. In 2005, he donated an additional $200,000 to purchase commercial-grade equipment for the ice cream lab.

Before his death, he set up the Oreggia Family Foundation, including assets from the estate of his sister, Sabina. To honor Oreggia's memory, the Oreggia Family Foundation intends to support Cal Poly's College of Agriculture for many years to come. "We are looking forward to a continuing partnership," stressed Oreggia Family Foundation trustees Taylor and Denny Bertelsman.

Oreggia Family Foundation donations so far include $45,000 per year for five years for the new Wine and Viticulture program; $68,000 toward the Cal Poly Creamery; $24,000 for discretionary projects; and $337,000 to purchase new equipment for a variety of departments in the college, including expansion of the Animal Science equine embryo transfer lab. Added to Oreggia's initial gifts, the total now approaches $900,000.

The trustees know their longtime friend would approve. "What's happening in labs and classrooms at Cal Poly's College of Agriculture," said Taylor, "is exactly what Arden Oreggia wanted to see going on there."