

# Access to the Future



## Vandal Fest | Avelardo Vargas

Watch how Avelardo Vargas discovered his path to U of I through the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and Chobani Scholars Program. Once here, he found a passion for helping others find their voice.

## Scholarships and CAMP Bolster Student Leader in Dairy and Agriculture

Working from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. every day while in high school isn't conducive to completing college applications.

But that's what Avelardo Vargas did.

"There were a lot of things that could have impeded me from continuing my education," Vargas said. "But most of those problems were resolved because I met the right people."

It was those people — his family, a University of Idaho recruitment specialist and scholarship donors — who opened the door to an education for the junior. Vargas is earning his degree in Animal and Veterinary Sciences so he can help the dairy industry — the work in which he was raised — find solutions to problems the industry faces.

And Vargas hasn't let the door close behind him. He's holding it open for others.

## Additional Resources

Brave. Bold. A Promise to Idaho's Students

CAMP

Chobani Scholars

Dairy Club

Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences Club



## A Path to Success

The Vargas family has worked in the Idaho dairy industry for more than 20 years.

“I always said I wanted to go into dairy, just like my dad. He brought me to work with him,” said Vargas, who helped his dad with chores on a small 200-cow dairy. “The work taught me a lot of discipline and responsibility while growing up.”

“”

The people within the dairy industry are extremely hard working.

— Avelardo Vargas, junior in CALS

Although he toyed with other career options during middle school, the Rupert native quickly returned to his original goal, mostly due to his coworkers.

“The people within the dairy industry are extremely hard working,” Vargas said. “I realized that my true passion was here in the dairy industry, and I wanted to stay close to the family roots and continue my education.”

Vargas’s parents, who are from Mexico, didn’t have the opportunity to attend high school, a fact that led them to push their children to complete their schooling, he said.

“I think part of the reason my dad would take me to work with him was to show me that life isn’t easy and that the real path to success is education,” Vargas said. “And my mom, she got her GED during my senior year. She wanted to show us how important education is.”



Avelardo Vargas wants to return to the dairy industry because of the life lessons he learned there as a teenager.



## Finding Assistance

Vargas found applying to college and navigating admittance difficult and confusing, especially while working a full-time job at a 5,000-cow dairy during high school. He received guidance through what can be an overwhelming process by working with the [College Assistance Migrant Program \(CAMP\)](#).

“CAMP is the only federally funded program at U of I that specifically serves students in higher education that come from migrant and seasonal farm working backgrounds. U of I CAMP provides academic, financial and culturally responsive support for them,” said Evelina Arevalos-Martinez, CAMP director. “This culturally-responsive support is definitely what helps our program be successful. When we’re recruiting the student, we’re really recruiting the entire family. We include the family to help make the decision on whether the student is going to become a Vandal.”

---

“““

When we’re recruiting the student, we’re really recruiting the whole family.

— Evelina Arevalos-Martinez, CAMP director



Victor Canales-Gamiño, who was a CAMP recruitment specialist, worked with Vargas between his shifts at the dairy helping him with applications and ensuring the high schooler took advantage of all available opportunities. Canales also translated the college application process for Vargas's mother, who speaks English as a second language.

"I'm really close to my family, and since none of them have ever gone to college, it was really important for me to keep them in the loop," Vargas said. "CAMP kept my family involved throughout the whole process of coming to college."

In addition to helping Vargas get to school, they are also helping him stay here. CAMP works with all their students to complete not just their first year and, in time, earn their degree.

A huge monetary impediment for Vargas was removed when he became a [Chobani Scholar](#) a multi-year scholarship providing financial support to students with family connections to the dairy industry who want to pursue a career in dairy.

Vargas said that he likely wouldn't have been able to attend college without the scholarship.

"The scholarship changed not just my life but my family's life as well," said Vargas, who is in the first cohort of Chobani scholars.



Avelardo Vargas worked with CAMP to keep his family involved in every step of the college application process.



## Raising Voices

Once Vargas settled into his classes in the [College of Agricultural and Life Sciences](#), he realized he wanted to open doors for others. He saw a growing need to support underrepresented students in agriculture.

He helped start the [U of I campus chapter of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences \(MANRRS\)](#) in 2020. A national organization, MANRRS fosters the inclusion and advancement of ethnic and cultural groups underrepresented in their fields and students who are underrepresented throughout their studies and careers.



My parents taught me to make the most use out of my time and help others as much as I could.

— Avelardo Vargas, junior in CALS

The dairy industry, like many divisions of agriculture, relies heavily on immigrants and minorities, Vargas said. But despite making up the bulk of the workforce, their representation at decision-making levels of the industry is not proportional.

“People in agriculture always ask, ‘How many cows does your family own?’ And, you know, they’re not really ours. We just work there,” Vargas said. “It is really important to give all these students from different minorities a voice in the agricultural industry and show them that they’re valued in this industry.”

He didn’t stop with forming the chapter. Vargas took on leadership roles as a [CALS ambassador](#) and an [Agriculture Future of America Campus ambassador](#), and he participates in the [U of I Dairy Club](#).

“My parents taught me to make the most use out of my time and help others as much as I could,” Vargas said.

He hopes other college hopefuls won’t let barriers stop them from following their goals. He suggests that anyone trying to find a way to attend college should not be afraid to ask for help.

“I had to get out there and look for the opportunities and people that would help break down the barriers that stood in the way of continuing my education,” Vargas said. “Without the support of those who have helped me along the way, I would not be where I am today.”



Avelardo Vargas helped start the U of I campus chapter of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences.

*Published in the Spring 2022 issue of Here We Have Idaho.*

*Article by [Leigh Cooper](#), University Communications and Marketing.*

*Photography by [Melissa Hartley](#), University Communications and Marketing*

*Videography by [Kara Billington](#) and [Will Knecht](#), University Communications and Marketing*