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Ava Fernandes gets a big hug from a member of the Tulare Western water polo team. PROVIDED BY VERONICA COVERT

# The ‘fairest and friendliest ladies’

Tulare Western girls water polo team takes pillar very seriously

**Meade Trueworthy**  
Visalia Times-Delta  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Every year Character Counts! honors a student who doesn’t discriminate, plays by the rules and shows fairness. But what happens when you can’t pick just one student?

That’s the case for this year’s Fairness winner. The Tulare Western High School girls water polo team exemplifies what it means to be Fair.

The TWHS girls water polo team is described by Counselor Veronica Covert as the “fairest and friendliest ladies with our students and staff,” the nominator said. “This year, we have a Down Syndrome student named Ava Fernandes and they have taken her under their wings”.

The transition from middle school to high school can be tough, but these girls took it upon themselves to make sure Ava feels at home.

“On a campus of over 1,800 students, they have made the transition to high school much smoother

See PILLAR, Page 4A

## Finalists: Fairness

**Meade Trueworthy**  
Visalia Times-Delta  
USA TODAY NETWORK

**Student Name: Aiden Dowdy**  
**Grade:** 12  
**School:** Visalia Technical Early College High School, Visalia  
**Statement:**  
Nominator Travis Wyrick says, “Aiden is the FFA Chapter Cotton Team Captain and has been a member of the team for the last four years. Aiden seeks to see others be successful, and ensure that they have the opportunity and tools available to them. Aiden is willing to work with everyone and genuinely wants to see others do their best, even if their best means beating him.

He has been a source of consistency at VTEC and in the FFA Program, yet he is humble enough to play down his successes in the presence of others. Eleanor Roosevelt said, ‘It is not fair to ask of someone

See FAIRNESS, Page 4A

# County is No. 1 crop producer in the US

**Sheyanne N Romero**  
Visalia Times-Delta  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Tulare County is once again a top agriculture producer in the nation, surpassing \$8.61 billion in 2022, according to the county’s recently released annual crop report.

Tulare County’s agricultural strength is based on the diversity of the crops produced, Agricultural Commissioner Tom Tucker stated. In 2022, the county’s total agriculture production value was \$8,612,450,000. This represents an increase of \$522,828,700 or 6.5% above 2021’s value of \$8,089,621,300.

Tulare County beat out competing counties — Fresno and Kern — to become the country’s No.1 agricultural producer in 2022. The three Central Valley counties account for 44% of California’s total ag production value.

In 2022, California’s farms and ranches received \$55.9 billion in cash receipts for their output. This represents an 8.8% increase in cash receipts compared to the previous year, according to California Department of Food and Agriculture. More than a third of the country’s vegetables and nearly three-quarters of the country’s fruits and nuts are grown in California.

Here are the top takeaways from this year’s crop report.

### Milk

Milk continues to be the leading agricultural commodity in the county, valued at \$2,671,291,000. Milk revenue increased by 37% over 2021. The value of milk increased by \$7.20 per hundredweight. Additionally, milk represents 31% of the total crop and livestock value for 2022.

### Livestock and poultry

Livestock and Poultry’s gross value of \$823,251,000 represents an increase of 12% above 2021, mostly due to a higher per unit value for cattle. There were 720,000 head of cattle counted in 2022, at a value of \$1,060 per animal. Poultry accounted for \$47,209,000 of the total value of livestock and poultry at .63 cents per bird. In 2021, poultry was valued at \$1.08 per bird.

### Field crops

The total value of all field crop production in 2022 was \$745,489,000, an increase of 30% from the previous year, according to the crop report. This increase is mostly attributed to better prices for field crops across the board, Tucker stated. Fruit

See CROP, Page 4A

A photograph of a young woman in a black dress holding an American flag. She is looking off to the side. In the background, other people and flags are visible.

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IN BRIEF

Police: 4 women killed in multicar crash on Pacific Coast Highway

MALIBU, Calif. – A multicar crash on Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu killed four people and injured two others Tuesday night, authorities said.

The crash occurred at about 8:30 p.m., according to the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

“Preliminary information indicates four vehicles were involved in a traffic collision. Four female adults were pronounced deceased at the scene,” the county Sheriff’s Department said in a statement.

3 kids killed in New Orleans fire in suspected homicide, police say

NEW ORLEANS – The deaths of three children in an overnight house fire are being investigated as homicides, New Orleans police said.

In a Wednesday morning statement, police said a 3-year-old boy was found dead in an eastern New Orleans home. A 5-year-old girl and an 8-year-old boy died later at a hospital.

Police said the mother called 911 saying that their father planned to burn the house down.



The Tulare Western High School girls water polo team is this year’s winner for Character Counts! Week Fairness award. VERONICA COVERT/TULARE WESTERN

Pillar

Continued from Page 1A

for Ava,”

Covert said. “They invite her to eat lunch with them, they walk her to classes and are genuinely happy to see Ava when she comes to varsity water polo matches to cheer on her older sister.”

The girls love to see Ava at matches and use her enthusiasm to thrive in the water

“I am a sophomore now, so last year was my first year at Tulare Western. So I can remember joining the team and being scared of the older girls. But luckily for me the girls water polo team here is filled with the most welcoming and kindest girls I’ve ever met,” Team member Lauren Starr said. “This year, that freshmen is Ava. She may not play waterpolo but she is definitely a big part of our team. Ava is always smiling, encouraging us, and giving us our daily hugs which are much needed. Ava makes every day better and will always be a big part of our team.”

Tulare County Office of Education’s selection committee recognized the girls’ team’s qualities as soon as they read Covert’s nomination.

“All the pillars are interconnected and enhance the qualities of each other,” the committee wrote. “In addition, understanding this relationship is essential in making ethical and effective decisions.

“The case of the TWHS girl’s water polo team is a perfect example of this interconnected relationship.”

As the educators pointed out, the team did not pre-

judge Ava, they got to know her.

“By including Ava, they did not judge her by her appearance, they judged her on the content of her character (Fairness Pillar) thereby allowing the attributes of the caring pillar to evolve, compassion and kindness,” members said.

The girls say Ava is simply a good person who makes the team stronger.

“We enjoy being around Ava because she resembles what it means to be a good person and we should all strive to be more like Ava which includes her love for everyone around her, her ability to support everyone without fail, and the joy she gets from being around others,” Student and waterpolo player Olivia Machado said. “She is always happy and never fails to put a smile on surrounding people’s faces. She is very uplifting and constantly giving the team hugs, encouraging us to do our best, and congratulating us after a game.”

The team said win or lose, they’re better with Ava on their side of the pool

“She truly knows how to make someone feel important even on the worst days and she embodies everything our team needs and that is why she is so important to every single one of us and our entire Mustang family,” Machado said.

Every year the Character Counts Fairness award honors a student who doesn’t discriminate, plays by the rules, and treats others equally and in an unbiased manner. This year’s Fairness winner is not one individual, but a group of girls that have gone out of their way to model this Character Counts pillar on a daily basis.

Fairness

Continued from Page 1A

else what you are not willing to do yourself.’ Aiden lives up to being a fair person willing to do, willing to try, and willing to support others.”

**Student Name: Macie E. Mosley**  
Grade: 3  
School: Linwood Elementary School, Visalia  
Statement:  
Nominator Pauline Jimenez-Sanchez says, “Macie has the class job of being in charge of our computer cart. Her job is to make sure everyone receives their laptop every day. She has to make sure that their laptops are fully charged and that her classmates’ computers are placed in the correct spot on the cart before the end of the day. Macie works hard on this every day! She is also very helpful toward her classmates. Macie is always willing to help any of her classmates that are in need. I am very proud of Macie and I am so very happy that she is in my class this year. I am honored to be her teacher!”



Mosely

**Student Name: Samuel Ortega**  
Grade: 10  
School: Redwood High School, Visalia  
Statement:  
Nominator Xicotencatl Rojas says, “In the short period of time I have known Samuel, he has exemplified what it means to be fair. He is a model student in class that brings a sense of justice and peace to his peers. He plays by the rules in both sports and academics. Even though he is only a sophomore, his strong work ethic has earned him a place on the varsity football program. He, along with the class, helped create a social contract where he voiced strong opinions which made sense and came from a fair place.”



Ortega

**Student Name: Addyson Vera**  
Grade: 7  
School: Alpine Vista School, Tulare  
Statement:  
Nominator Jenna Porchia says, “Addyson has already made an impression on her teachers and classmates as one who is kind, respectful, and fair. She makes sure that everyone at her table gets a chance to speak during group discussions. She also shows fairness on the volleyball court. She works well with her teammates and does not hog the ball. She makes sure everyone gets a chance to do their best and get their practice in, and she even suggests drills that would benefit the team as a whole. She is a student and athlete of great character!”



Vera



Selah Tanner of Orosi, 11, visits with Miss Piggy, a 17-year-old beef amber cow Feb. 14 during World Ag Expo at the International Agri-Center in Tulare. RON HOLMAN/VISALIA TIMES-DELTA