

Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our first unit of study, “Cultivating Natural Resources.”

This year, our fifth grade students will build literacy and language skills by participating in ten cross-disciplinary units of study in our Benchmark Advance Program. Each three-week unit features a topic, ranging from economics to earth science, history and culture to themes in literature, and more. The units are designed to focus on two shorter selections during the first week, which will prepare students to explore the content more deeply in the second and third weeks as they read longer passages. As students read poems, stories, plays, and informational articles, they will strengthen reading and writing skills and strategies, participate in meaningful collaborative conversations, and make connections to their other content area studies. We look forward to sharing your child’s progress with you!

As we start each unit, I will send home a letter like this one, introducing the unit focus and skills your child is learning. I will also suggest activities you and your child can do together at home to build on the work we’re doing in class.

In this unit, your child will read and compare selections about plants, their function, and how humans cultivate food crops and develop these natural resources. They will look especially at the history of corn as a food and energy resource in North America, and follow its development into the industry it is today. The selections in this unit feature a variety of genres, including informational texts, opinion essays, folktales, and editorials.

This unit is sure to inspire deeper interest in where our food comes from, and it provides good opportunities for out-of-the-classroom learning.

I look forward to working together as partners this year. Should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child’s progress, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Cultivating Natural Resources

In this unit, we'll read about how our food resources affect us, and we'll think about the question "How do we decide which resources we should develop?" Here are some activities designed to continue the conversation about how we cultivate natural resources, and to build on the skills and concepts your child is learning in school.

Topic Connection

Planning a Garden

During this unit, students discuss the question "How do we decide which resources we should develop?" Discuss that question in relation to your own family. Plan with your child what kinds of foods you would plant in your own personal garden. Discuss vegetables that you both enjoy eating, as well as those that you feel would be important to grow and eat if only for their nutritional value. Research each plant to see if it grows well in your environment. If you have the time and space, consider planting the garden with your child.

Vocabulary Connection

Farming Charades Game

Your child is learning new words associated with cultivating food natural resources, such as **consumption**, **cultivated**, **depleting**, **dominate**, **emergence**, and **surplus**. Review the meaning of each word with your child. Then play charades together to act out each word. Write each word on a scrap of paper, then fold them and mix them up in a bowl or hat. Choose three for you to act out and three for your child to act out.

Comprehension Connection

Reading Food Labels

In this unit, your child will be reading about different ways that corn is used in America and throughout the world. To help explore this idea further, go to the grocery store with your child and look at food labels. Make a list of 10–15 packaged foods that have corn on the ingredients label. This can be in the form of corn syrup or other forms of corn.

Word Study Connections

Brainstorming Help for the World

Focus on the word *surplus* and work with your child to name as many things as possible that the world could do with a *surplus* of corn. He or she may name things mentioned in the unit, such as using it for biofuel or helping nations in need plant it for their own food supplies. Try to come up with many more options for the crop surplus.