

Chicago high school specializes in ag sciences

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Chicago -Every year about 3,000 students in Chicago apply to go to the publicly funded Chicago High School for Agriculture Sciences, and a lottery picks about 175.

Every one of the 700 students at this school starts by taking general agriculture courses – as well as all the required ones in the state – for the first two years, followed by their chosen areas of ag study for the last two.

Two students from this school, Adam Villarreal and Helen SaTsu, gave a well-received presentation to worldwide agriculture investors, bankers and industry leaders, here at the Ag Tech Nexus conference.

The school is on 74 farmed acres, with every student having to work on that farm. However the agriculture courses taught go far beyond that on-farm work.

Villarreal detailed how students start with generalized courses, such as projects involving agriculture communication, crop sciences and research papers on how to solve third world agriculture problems.

They can then branch out into specialized areas in their last two years, such as agriculture finances and markets, agriculture mechanics, biotechnology like GMOs, computer modelling, such as for soil research, or food sourcing, which involves buying and selling.

Villarreal, a Chicago city kid, is also now working on a farm for the summer. He sees a future in soil testing projects, in the field of crop science.

"It's a passion, I just love it," he said.

SaTsu has done detailed research at the high school over the past two years on delaying meat spoilage. With a long-term goal of working in research along these lines, and unable to afford expensive American universities, she is going to Japan to further her studies.

"Japan is cheaper, and has a strict education system, plus it will broaden my world," said SaTsu.