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OUR VIEW

## We'll all reap the rewards

Literacy Campaign website:  
[www.literacycampaignmc.org](http://www.literacycampaignmc.org)

Illiteracy is a social problem that is supposed to plague underdeveloped countries, not the world's superpower.

Yet an estimated 40 million Americans don't read very well - not at 12th-grade level anyway - and it's fair to say a lot of them don't care. They get by, for now, but increasingly in the Information Age, they may not.

Locally, the literacy picture is just as grim. An estimated one in four adults between ages 18 to 35 read at below the fourth-grade level.

So who's to blame? Our public schools system? A rural, farm-based and service-sector economy? The individual?

It could be a combination of the three, coupled with the fact that America has become complacent about its progress toward literacy. We are better educated and more literate today than at any time in our nation's history. Is that good enough? No way.

Today's U.S. economy is morphing into a complex, information-based economy. Those who will succeed in it will be those those who have the skills and savvy to change with it.

In August, William J. Moloney, Colorado's commissioner of education, wrote in USA Today: "Beyond the lower rung of the agricultural and service sectors, this economy has ever fewer places for the marginally literate. ... The person who cannot read will be disconnected from the American Dream."

Jim Bogart, president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, echoed that message Thursday as part of the Community Foundation for Monterey County's award of \$300,000 in grants to local literacy programs.

Through Bogart, it's good to see the agriculture industry's recognition of literacy as vital to the future of its work force and to the community's future as a whole.

As we are seeing in the Salinas area, illiteracy breeds illiteracy and the problems of poverty and crime that stem from it.

But as Bogart said, "Good reading and writing skills are vital ... and can afford opportunities for workers and families to not just sustain themselves, but promote themselves."

Perhaps most importantly, literacy can fundamentally alter the way parents participate in their children's lives.

While we're pumping money into these programs, we also must look to bolstering the many cultural and educational opportunities in our literate world: Arts and music programs in the schools are known to boost learning. Museums, orchestras and galleries do, too.

Adult schools are central to literacy. And don't forget the invaluable contributions of our public libraries to literacy. Let Wednesday's generous awards serve as an inspiration for more investment toward total literacy in our time.