

Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture

2025 Man of the Year

Jess Brown

Jess Brown serves as Executive Director of the San Mateo/Santa Cruz/Santa Clara Counties Farm Bureaus and the educational organization, Agri-Culture. For over 40 years, Jess has been dedicated to working on behalf of the county's largest industry, bringing our county to the attention of state and national status. He has been on many boards in the community leading organizational strength that makes our community so great. Jess is humble by uplifting others, so they shine.

There are people who are part of the fabric of a community, weaving in and out, working behind the scenes to ensure that people are in place, systems are developed, conversations occur, and events are the best they can be, all while promoting others through his leadership. For close to 45 years, the Farm Bureau of Santa Cruz County's Executive Director Jess Brown has been that person.

Jess is a graduate of three state and national leadership programs which allowed him to study in Japan, China, Hong Kong, Germany and Denmark. Jess has volunteered five times to teach organizational skills to re-settled farmers in Zimbabwe. He has also taught financial skills to agro-dealers in Mozambique.

He was a founder of Ag Against Hunger, an organization that was in business for 29 years and distributed close to 300 million pounds of donated local produce to people in need. It was started to connect farmers' excess produce to local food banks so it would feed the community and not go to waste. While Ag Against Hunger is no longer in business, the impact of that organization changed thousands of lives in the region.

Looking for solutions to existing problems has been at the heart of Jess's leadership and demonstrated when the agricultural industry faced two Pajaro Valley levee breaches, Covid, working on ag land protections, welcoming new growth industries like cannabis and organics. As a result of his forward-thinking approach, he has been highly sought after to present what is happening in this county at state and national level.

The agricultural community has been led by a selfless leader, engaged in elevating its presence locally, as well as on the state and national stage. His measured approach to collaborative leadership has resulted in other farm bureau's seeking his expertise to replicate what he has done for the Pajaro Valley. He is now the executive director of two other farm bureaus in neighboring counties.

A visionary, Jess, along with Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau board members, started Ari-Culture, a nonprofit organization that makes it possible for students to receive scholarships as they pursue their education in agriculturally related fields.

They also started Focus Agriculture, which is dedicated to educating local leaders about the agricultural industry and the people dedicated to growing food for the local community, and beyond. This nationally acclaimed program is being replicated in multiple counties after looking at the model presented by Leadership Santa Cruz County.

The Farm Bureau now has 16 endowed funds to provide scholarships for students pursuing agriculture as a career or help with farmworker housing.

Under Jess's leadership, several events have been successful in providing opportunities for people in the agricultural industry to connect, network and raise funds. Some of which include, The Testicle Festival, National Agriculture Day Spring Luncheon, Down to Earth Women Luncheon, Jimmie Cox Memorial Scholarship awards, Annual Golf Tournament and Farmer of the Year Awards.

In addition to his leadership at the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, Jess has served on multiple nonprofit boards across the county, including a limited list (there are many more):

Second Harvest Food Bank

Leadership Santa Cruz County

Goodwill Central Coast

Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County

Monterey Museum of Art

Cabrillo College Foundation

Tannery Arts Center

Visit Santa Cruz County

Dominican Foundation

Jess would prefer to focus on the accomplishments that others have made, however, in many respects, what we see has been made possible by what Jess does.