

# 2026 Man of the Year

## Kirk Schmidt

Kirk Schmidt's leadership has quietly but profoundly strengthened the Pajaro Valley.

His long-standing service with the Santa Cruz County Fair Foundation reflects a deep commitment to one of our community's most important gathering places. His steady guidance has helped ensure the fairgrounds remain a vibrant resource to our community and a place that preserves the region's vital agricultural roots.

Kirk's leadership in the agricultural community has been invaluable. Through his work with the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau—including serving as President and being named Farmer of the Year twice—he has been a strong advocate for local growers and a respected voice advancing the sustainability and success of our region's farming industry. He has also generously shared his expertise beyond our region, working with Rotary International and other programs to support farmers both locally and around the world. Through hands-on training, mentorship, and technical assistance, he has helped strengthen agricultural practices and improve livelihoods in communities across the globe.

His expertise and leadership with the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County has helped direct significant investment into local nonprofits, strengthening the fabric of our community in lasting ways. Also of note, at a critical time when our local hospital faced closure he stepped in when many were hesitant to get involved. He rolled up his sleeves, took a careful look at the hospital's financial status, plan and promise and provided the confidence needed for others to invest. This resulted in preventing closure and returning the hospital to community ownership.

Kirk has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to leadership, community service, and agricultural innovation in the Pajaro Valley and beyond. His decades of service reflect a deep dedication to improving local institutions, advancing sustainable agriculture, and supporting global farming communities.

### **Community Leadership & Service**

Kirk has held numerous influential leadership roles across Santa Cruz County and the Central Coast, contributing his expertise in governance, finance, and community development:

- UC Santa Cruz Foundation Board of Trustees (2025–Present)
- Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County (2017–2025)
  - Treasurer (2023–2025)

- Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds Foundation Board Member (2015–Present)
- Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture Board (2012–2018)
  - Chairman (2017)
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (2000–2016)
  - Chair (2012–2014)
- Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency (2010–2026)
  - Chair: Rate & Best Management Practices
- Rotary Club of Freedom, California
  - President (2010–2011)
- Agri-Culture (non-profit) Board Member (1997–2013)

Kirk's business leadership was also recognized when Quail Mountain Herbs received the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Award twice.

### **Agricultural Leadership & Innovation**

Kirk's career in agriculture spans decades of leadership, entrepreneurship, and environmental stewardship:

- Executive Director, Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc. (2005–2018)
  - Led a nonprofit focused on water quality monitoring and education for Central Coast agriculture
- Vice President, HerbThyme Farms, Inc. (2004–2005)
- President, Quail Mountain Herbs, LLC (1991–2004)
- Founding Partner, Quail Mountain Herbs (1979)
- President, Watsonville Roses, Inc. (1995–Present)

His contributions have helped shape sustainable farming practices and strengthen the regional agricultural economy.

### **International Agricultural Impact**

Kirk has shared his expertise globally, supporting farmers and agricultural systems in developing regions through training, consulting, and infrastructure projects:

- Uganda (2026) – Farm & fertilizer development and water well development (Rotary)
- Mozambique (2016, 2011) – Farm planning, irrigation, and grant development
- Malawi (2014) – Farm & irrigation systems
- Tanzania (2013) – Business planning and leadership training
- Thailand (2012) – Village water system (Rotary International VTT)
- Georgia (2010) – Greenhouse vegetable production

His international work reflects a commitment to improving food systems and livelihoods worldwide.

### **Industry Recognition & Leadership**

- Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau
  - Farmer of the Year (2000, 2003)
  - President (1993–1995)
  - Board Member (1989–1997)
- Monterey County Farm Bureau Board Member (2001–2003)
- United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association Leadership Fellow (1996)

### **Teaching & Mentorship**

Kirk has shared his knowledge with students and professionals, shaping future leaders in business and agriculture:

- Lecturer, Agricultural Finance, California State University, Monterey Bay (2007)
- Instructor, Business Law, Cabrillo College (1982–1986)
- International teaching in Mozambique (2012), focusing on business planning

### **Education**

- Juris Doctor, University of Santa Clara School of Law (1976)
- Bachelor of Arts, Social Science, University of California, Berkeley (1972)

### **Conclusion**

Kirk's career reflects an extraordinary blend of local leadership, agricultural excellence, and global humanitarian impact. His sustained commitment to community service,

environmental stewardship, and mentorship makes him a truly deserving to receive the title of Man of the Year.