

# Between the Furrows

A Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Monthly Publication

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Between The Furrows is a monthly publication of the SCoCFB. Members receive a subscription as part of their membership investment.

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## Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Named County of the Year



The County of the Year Award was presented to the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. (L-R) Ron Peterson, 2nd Vice-President, California Farm Bureau; Jess Brown, Executive Director, Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau; C. J. Miller, 2nd Vice-President; Dennis Webb, Past President; John Pisturino, President; Shannon Douglass, President, California Farm Bureau; Shaun Crook, 1st Vice-President, California Farm Bureau

The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau received the “County of the Year” award at the California Farm Bureau 2025 Annual Meeting in Anaheim this December. This award was given to Santa Cruz for its outstanding leadership in membership acquisition, advocacy work and community-based programs.

A local delegation of four attended the California Farm Bureau’s Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, December 6-9. The official delegates representing the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau were John Pisturino, President; and Dennis Webb, Past-President. The Alternate Delegate was CJ Miller, 2nd Vice-President. Also attending

from Santa Cruz County was Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Executive Director Jess Brown.

“There are 54 County Farm Bureaus, so we were very honored to receive the ‘County of the Year’ award,” said John Pisturino, Farm Bureau President. He further stated, “The Annual Meeting is a great opportunity for Farm Bureau members throughout the state to discuss mutual issues that affect farming. It is also an opportunity to meet, make new friends while preparing our organization for the legislative issues that lie ahead in 2026.”

There are 54 County Farm Bureaus in California. ■

# President's Message

## Long Awaited Award



John Pisturino, President

During December 6<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup>, the California Farm Bureau held their 107<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Anaheim, CA. Dennis Webb, C. J. Miller, Jess Brown and I attended the meeting. In the course of the meeting, the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau won the County of the Year Award for our strong efforts to increase membership. Santa Cruz County won the award in 2013, 2014 and 2015. After that we came in second until this year. With the hard work of our Board of Directors, we finally won it again. I believe with our hard work we can do it again next year.

The board hosted programs, launched initiatives and developed newsletter content

while partnering with community groups to promote fundraising and educational events. The annual National Agriculture Day celebration is an example of these efforts, as it fosters local education and community involvement in agriculture.

Our Farm Bureau also implemented a strategic plan to strengthen our financial stability by increasing income and reducing expenses. We also host an annual retreat every January featuring new member orientations that cover the county Farm Bureau's practices and policies. ■



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# ASK EMILY

**Emily Jane Freed, UC Cooperative Extension Area Director,  
Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties**

## Watching Out for You



Emily Jane Freed

Emily's first job after college was as an Assignment Editor for an ABC affiliate television station. An Assignment Editor's role is central and critical to the newsroom. A few of her daily tasks included coordinating logistics to get breaking news on the air, dispatching reporters and photographers to stories, and managing the daily flow of news by monitoring scanners, verifying phone calls from the public, and following radio and print stories. The news station's tag line was, "Watching Out for You." She enjoyed working at the news desk; however, organic agriculture and promoting sustainable food systems eventually won over as her chosen career path. Emily still uses the phrase "Watching Out for You" and has incorporated it into her new role as Area Director for the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) offices in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties.

Here are a few ways in which UCCE is "watching out for you" on the Central Coast.

Sign up for our Central Coast quarterly newsletter. Be in the know about workshops and events, research updates, and technical assistance opportunities from Advisors and staff in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, and San Mateo Counties. <https://ucanr.edu/county/santa-cruz-county/newsletters-blogs>

Check out the UC Master Gardeners of Monterey & Santa Cruz Counties website. The UC Master Gardeners on the Central Coast was established in 1995 and supports local gardeners through workshops and classes, community events, school gardens, information booths, and youth and therapeutic gardens. <https://ucanr.edu/site/uc-master-gardeners-monterey-santa-cruz-counties>

Reach out to Emily if there is anything in your hopper that you would like to chat about in 2026. She is interested in meeting local growers, connecting with industry leaders, engaging with community members to strengthen educational and science-based partnerships on the Central Coast. As we say at UCCE, "We are here to help." Emily Jane Freed can be reached at [ejfreed@ucanr.edu](mailto:ejfreed@ucanr.edu). ■

**Your contributions to Agri-Culture are tax deductible!**

*Please visit [agri-culture.us/donations](https://agri-culture.us/donations) and consider making a contribution to support agriculture education in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley.*

*Thank You*

# THE WATER NANNY

## Reefer Madness, the Sequel

As enlightened Californians we've moved on from the 1930s dark days of sinister drug peddlers luring our high school children into *Madness*. In another of your Nanny's crop reports, let's explore the rapid rise and slow fall of hyper regulated *Cannabis Madness*.

No farmer is a fan of regulations. Compared to any other farm, cannabis is over regulated to raise taxes, mandate environmental objectives and to prevent illegal grows. That goal seems to only motivate farms to fall off the wagon back into the dark side. The biggest grow bust for the state in 2025 was Ladybug Farms in Pajaro, a formerly enrolled grower who failed to renew their licenses, and also avoid collateral county regulations.



Way back in 2018 Monterey County was the a free for all rush to plant in established greenhouses, resulting in high greenhouse values, restoration of old greenhouse wrecks, and significant county revenue with few building regulations. Annual county revenues plummeted from \$20M to less than \$3M. Over production, impacts all crops, so to with pot. To help stabilize the industry, tax rates have been reduced from \$15 per square foot of canopy space to \$2.13 in February 2023. Nursery rates are \$0.71 per square foot and dispensary sales taxes for the county are 4.15% of gross receipts. The freedom to grow in greenhouses that lead to a boom, has been reined in with extensive building and water quality mandates which do not apply to any other crop, like fire sprinklers in each greenhouse and packing shed, extensive drinking water quality requirements for irrigation, all adding more than \$500,000-\$1,000,000 per large greenhouse range. Maybe this is why Ladybug became an outlaw.

Santa Cruz ran this process in reverse, initially mandating that cannabis was not a crop, and therefore subject to new construction permitting guidelines, including sprinklers, fire hydrants and massive water storage Turns out no one was successful in getting an indoor grow permit, so Santa Cruz, always on the cutting regulatory edge regulated pot as a crop, with pre-existing ag use to license many local greenhouses. Tax revenues are based on a percentage of gross sales. In 2020-21 Santa Cruz received tax revenue

of \$6.3M, the projection for 2025-26 is a mere \$303,000. The revenue will be only 1/3 of the overhead of the Cannabis Licensing division resulting in a \$500,000+ shortfall. As farms are failing, the tax rate has increased from 5% to 7%, which is significantly higher than Monterey, creating a competitive disadvantage.

Late to the oversight game is Department of Fish and Wildlife. The initial review is a Self-Certification agreement showing the grower will not "*substantially modify any river, stream, or lake.*" Easy, but if the grower stumbles and attracts greater inspections by any agency, F&W tags along to have an on-field inspection. Too often the miscreant grower didn't notice they had to complete the Self Cert document, so they need to comply with the "Standard Agreement" which includes channel clearing activities, even if your ditch is not a regulated stream or lake, along with foreseeable impacts on *vegetation* (?). This process is very subjective, with costs escalating with the mood of the inspector, who had to drive down from Sacramento. Of course, the Water Board has a dissimilar but parallel set of regulations.

Legal cannabis, like all produce, is a slim margin business which needs stable regulations, in order to have a profitable year. Overlapping jurisdictions with divergent goals makes this difficult. On the other hand, there are many, freshly restored, greenhouses available for other crops, maybe roses. At least the growers can get solace from their well-tended buds. "*I now have absolute proof that smoking even one marijuana cigarette is equal in brain damage to being on Bikini Island during an H-bomb blast.*" (Ronald Reagan). ■





# FAVORITE RECIPES

## Clam Chowder

There are many good clam chowder recipes out there, and I have tried a few, but this one from Natasha's Kitchen is a great place to start if you've not made clam chowder before. It's really quite good, especially on a cold. Winter day.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 6 slices lean bacon, cut into 1/2" strips   | 1 1/2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce                           |
| 2 medium carrots, sliced into rings or half-rings                                   | 1/2 teaspoon Tabasco sauce                                     |
| 2 celery ribs, finely diced   | 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme                                       |
| 1 small onion, finely diced   | 1 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper, or to taste |
| 4 Tablespoons all-purpose flour   | 1 1/2 pounds (6) medium potatoes, Yukon Gold or Russet, peeled |
| 2 cups low sodium chicken broth or stock  | 2 cups milk, any kind  |
| 3 - 6.5 ounce cans of chopped clams, drained with juices reserved, about 1 1/2 cups | 1 cup whipping cream or heavy whipping cream                   |
| 1 bay leaf  | 2 Tablespoons chopped cilantro, optional for garnish           |

- Heat a large pot or Dutch oven over med/high heat and add the chopped bacon. Saute, stirring occasionally until browned and crisp. Transfer to a paper towel lined plate. Keep about 3 Tablespoons of bacon grease in the pot.
- Add your veggies - onions, carrots and celery - and continue to cook over med/high heat, stirring occasionally until soft and golden (7-8 minutes). Sprinkle in flour and saute another minute, stirring constantly.
- Build your broth - Add chicken broth, reserved clam juice, bay leaf, Worcestershire, Tabasco sauce, thyme, salt and black pepper. Bring the soup to a light boil.
- While the soup is heating up, chop potatoes into bite-sized pieces. Add potatoes to pot, then stir in milk and whipping cream. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and lightly boil until potatoes are easily pierced with a fork, about 20 minutes.
- When the potatoes are tender, add chopped clams, return to a light boil and remove from heat. Don't overcook clams or they will get tough. Season to taste with salt and pepper. To serve, garnish with cooked bacon and fresh cilantro is desired.

### **Notes:**

- The soup will thicken more as it cools. If needed, you can thin it out by adding more milk or chicken broth and bringing it to a boil once more.
- Add the clams at the end, just bringing it to a boil then removing it from the heat. Overcooked clams can be chewy and rubbery.
- Don't skip the bacon. Just a little bit of bacon adds so much flavor both in the soup and as a topping.
- Store leftovers in the fridge in an air-tight container for 3-5 days. Freezing is not recommended.
- Natasha's Kitchen is a food blog with tried and true recipes. You can find it at [natashaskitchen.com](http://natashaskitchen.com)

## Being a Member Pays Off!



**BECOME A FARM BUREAU MEMBER**

Join the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau



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The Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau is an important voice for the Santa Cruz County and Pajaro Valley agriculture industry. Everyone is eligible to be a member and receive the many benefits and services available. By joining the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau you help support agriculture in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley.

**How to Join**

Go to [www.cfbf.com](http://www.cfbf.com) and click on the "JOIN" button. No need to log in on this page. Go to the bottom of the page and click on NEVER BEEN A MEMBER to set up a new account.

Questions? Contact the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau  
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## I am a Farm Bureau member because...

"We joined the Farm Bureau because promoting and protecting family-based agriculture and rural values within the county and the state is the most important thing we can do to keep our community in California grounded, and protect our way of life."

James Behel  
Pacific Farm & Fruit



### Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau

#### **National Agriculture Day Spring Luncheon**

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Heritage Hall, Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds

#### **SCCFB 109th Annual Meeting**

Thursday, June 25, 2026

Location TBD

#### **California State Fair**

Friday, July 17, 2026 to Sunday, August 2, 2026

Cal Expo, Sacramento

#### **Santa Cruz County Fair**

Wednesday, September 16 to Sunday, September 20, 2026

Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds

#### **33rd Annual Golf Tournament**

Friday, September 25, 2026

Pajaro Valley Golf Club

#### **Annual Directors' Dinner**

Thursday, November 5, 2026

Location to be determined

#### **CFBF Annual Meeting**

December 1, 2026 to December 4, 2026

Reno, NV

### Agri-Culture

#### **18th Annual Down to Earth Women Luncheon**

Thursday, May 14, 2026

Driscoll's Rancho Corralitos

#### **18th Annual Testicle Festival**

Saturday, August 29, 2026

Estrada Deer Camp

#### **30th Annual Farm Dinner**

Friday, October 9, 2026

Land Trust Little Bee Barn

## The Resilience and Innovation of Santa Cruz County Agriculture



David Sanford

As we head into 2026, Santa Cruz County's agricultural community stands as a cornerstone of our local economy, culture, and environment. From the Pajaro Valley to the coastal hillsides, farming here is more than an industry – it's a way of life that sustains families, nourishes communities, and protects vital

ecosystems.

Agriculture continues to be one of the most productive and resilient sectors in Santa Cruz County. As our economic impact report published this past June details, agriculture contributes nearly \$1.6 billion annually to the county economy when accounting for local food processing and multiplier effects. This economic engine supports nearly 12,000 jobs, making farming and food processing the source of about one in every 18 local jobs. Every day, agriculture drives more than \$4.2 million into our economy. And organic

farming continues to thrive here, with certified production surpassing \$142 million and more than 160 registered operations, reinforcing Santa Cruz County's leadership in organic agriculture.

Beyond economics, working lands provide between \$206 million and \$583 million in ecosystem services throughout the county, including carbon storage, aquifer recharge, soil health, and habitat protection. Local initiatives – such as those led by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and UC Santa Cruz's Center for Agroecology – are advancing soil conservation, water efficiency, and climate-resilient farming practices, ensuring that local agriculture remains a force for sustainability and biodiversity. Santa Cruz County agriculture has weathered storms, floods, and market challenges with resilience and innovation. As we move into 2026, our farmers and ranchers continue to lead with their excellence in land stewardship and a commitment to feeding communities while protecting local agriculture for future generations. ■

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## Facts You May Not Know About Agriculture

### 1. Agriculture is the Largest Employer in the World

The agriculture industry is full of job opportunities ranging from desk jobs to field work; there is something for everyone. One of the most interesting facts about the agriculture industry is that it is the single largest employer in the world, employing 40 per cent of the global population.

The opportunities in the agriculture sector are endless. If you want to enter this ever-growing industry filled with learning and growth opportunities, then Agriculture Recruitment Specialists are here to help you to navigate the process and connect you with some of the biggest brands all over the world.

### 2. Nearly Everything We Eat and Wear is A Product of Agriculture

Look around you and you will find that almost everything you eat or wear comes from the crops and livestock raised on farms; hence are a product of the ever-growing agricultural industry. The list of products is just too long to list, ranging from cotton and wool to all kinds of fruits and vegetables.

## All Cities In California Must Obey State Housing Law



**O**n December 10, 2025, the California Supreme Court ended a long-running state court lawsuit called *Kennedy Commission v. Superior Court* by declining to hear an appeal to the California Supreme Court by the City of Huntington Beach.

Back in October 2021, Huntington Beach was supposed to adopt a housing element to plan for 13,368 new housing units, including many affordable homes for low-income residents. The city refused, setting off a legal battle that has just this week pretty much ended.

In March 2023, the California Attorney General, the Governor, and the state's Department of Housing and Community Development sued Huntington Beach. The Kennedy Commission, a nonprofit based in Orange County that advocates for affordable housing, joined the case against the City.

The case involves three important California planning terms:

**General Plan:** A city's general plan is a city's "blueprint" for future growth. Every city and county in California must have its own general plan that says how growth and development will occur over the next 20 years or more. It includes everything from where homes can be built to how transportation, parks, and environmental protection will be handled. The general plan must include not less than nine sections (called "elements") covering topics such as land use, transportation, *housing*, safety, and environmental justice.

**Housing Element:** The housing element is a special kind of element for at least two reasons. First, unlike other elements that may not change for decades, a housing element must be updated at least every eight years. Second, it's the only element that must also be approved by a state agency: the California Department of Housing and Community Development. The housing element must say how the city or county will meet its share of housing units in its region of the state at all income levels, from very low-income to market-rate. It must identify specific land where housing can be built

and describe how that housing will happen.

**Charter City:** California has two types of cities. Most cities are "general law cities," which follow all state laws. But about a quarter of California's cities have adopted their own charters. These "charter cities" have special authority over local matters (called "municipal affairs") like how their government is organized, election procedures, and contracting rules. Locally, Santa Cruz and Watsonville are charter cities; Scotts Valley and Capitola are general law cities. Huntington Beach is also a charter city and argued that as a charter city, it shouldn't have to follow state housing laws.

### The Court's Decision

A California appeals court ruled against Huntington Beach earlier in 2024, finding that the city's charter status does not exempt it from state housing laws. The appeals court ordered Huntington Beach to adopt a compliant housing element within 120 days and limited the city's ability to approve other development projects until it complied. The appeals court found that the California Legislature declared that the availability of housing is of vital statewide importance and that California is suffering from "a housing supply and affordability crisis of historic proportions."

So Huntington Beach appealed to the California Supreme Court. On December 11, 2025, the California Supreme Court announced that it would not hear the city's appeal and let the appeals court's ruling stand thereby requiring Huntington Beach to adopt a housing element as required by state law. All seven justices appeared to agree—there was no indication of any dissent.

After the California Supreme Court's decision, Huntington Beach must update its housing element and comply with state law. City officials must now work quickly to revise and submit a housing element that meets state standards, identifying sufficient sites for new development and adopt an actionable plan for affordable housing. This process will be closely monitored by state agencies to ensure compliance and progress toward alleviating the housing crisis.

The case now returns to the trial court, where Huntington Beach must show it has complied with the court decision.

[Continued on Page 9](#)



Written by Cameron McDonald, Agriculture Program Specialist  
Resource Conservation District, Santa Cruz County

## Soil Moisture Monitoring

Year-round irrigation scheduling is becoming increasingly important. Recent winters have included extended dry stretches—sometimes lasting more than a month—without significant rainfall. As a result, growers can no longer assume that soil moisture will be adequately replenished during the “wet” season and must continue monitoring soil conditions year-round. Historically, this level of attention was rarely necessary at this time of year, when rainfall patterns were more consistent and reliable.

One common way to determine soil moisture content is the traditional “feel and appearance” method. Our colleagues at the NRCS provide a helpful online guide, *Estimating Soil Moisture by Feel and Appearance*, which outlines the steps involved in this approach. With experience, this method can be used to estimate soil moisture conditions to an accuracy of about 5 percent, though the feel and appearance of soil will vary depending on soil texture and moisture content.

Making informed irrigation scheduling decisions offers many benefits, including reduced costs for water, energy, labor, and fertilizer, as well as improved crop quality. It is critical to avoid both over-watering and water stress, as either can negatively affect crop health and productivity. Too much water can lead to excessive runoff and/or deep percolation in which valuable water and nutrients are lost.

In addition to field-based methods, growers now have access to tools such as soil moisture sensors and tensiometers. These technologies provide real-time data that can take much of the guesswork out of irrigation management.

Tensiometers measure soil water tension, also known as matric potential. This reflects the amount of energy plant roots must exert to extract water from soil pores. As soil dries, tension increases, meaning plants must work harder to access water. Tensiometers continuously measure and display soil moisture conditions within the root zone and can be installed at multiple depths to reflect crop rooting patterns. With this information, growers can more confidently determine when irrigation is needed—and when it is not.

To learn more and connect with RCD programs and services contact: Cameron McDonald ([cmcdonald@rcdsantacruz.org](mailto:cmcdonald@rcdsantacruz.org)), Dan Hermstad at ([dhermstad@rcdsantacruz.org](mailto:dhermstad@rcdsantacruz.org)), or Sacha Lozano at ([slozano@rcdsantacruz.org](mailto:slozano@rcdsantacruz.org)). We would be happy to assist with irrigation scheduling and water conservation opportunities on your farm or ranch. The RCD also has programs related to forest health, fire prevention and environmental restoration. You can learn more about all our work at [www.rcdsantacruz.org](http://www.rcdsantacruz.org). All RCD services and programs are voluntary and non-regulatory. **¡Hablamos Español!** ■



### Legally Speaking - Continued from Page 8

**Attorney Fees Awarded:** The nonprofit Kennedy Commission was awarded \$3,531,201.10 to be paid by the city in attorney fees recognizing the “novelty and difficulty” of the housing rights issues litigated.

Meanwhile, Huntington Beach filed a separate federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of California’s

housing laws. Federal courts dismissed the case, but the city asked the U.S. Supreme Court to take it up on appeal. That request is still pending but in the meantime, Huntington Beach must comply with the California decision. ■

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## Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau **CULTURE**

- The SCCFB is firm in its **COMMITMENT** to provide responsive and effective services to its members, and to be a positive and integral part of the broader community through collaboration, education and social interaction.
- The SCCFB grows on a foundation of **TRUST**, bringing expertise, experience and good faith action to bear on topics related to agriculture, which can be relied upon by farmers, the agricultural community, and the community at large.
- The SCCFB honors and keeps its **TRADITION** of service to the diverse people, commodities and production systems that comprise the unique and complex agriculture community in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley.



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**Unknown**

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# Between the Furrows

A Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Monthly Publication

## CALENDAR

**THURSDAY - JANUARY 8**  
Policy & Resource  
Committee meeting

**MONDAY - JANUARY 19**  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Holiday  
Office Closed

**TUESDAY - JANUARY 20**  
Agri-Culture Board of  
Directors' meeting

**THURSDAY - JANUARY 29**  
Past Presidents' Luncheon  
Board Retreat  
Board of Directors' meeting

**THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 5**  
Policy & Resource  
Committee meeting

**FRIDAY - FEBRUARY 13**  
Deadline for submitting  
Agri-Culture's Scholarship  
applications

**SATURDAY - FEBRUARY 14**  
Valentine's Day

**MONDAY - FEBRUARY 16**  
President's Day Holiday  
Office Closed

**THURSDAY - FEBRUARY 26**  
Board of Directors' meeting

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