

John Jameson Elmore
(1926 – 2017)
2017 Farmer of the Year

Son to the late John and Hetty Joy Elmore, an early pioneering farming family, John Jameson Elmore was born on June 14, 1926 in Riverside, California and raised in Brawley, California.

John attended Brawley schools, graduating Brawley Union High School in 1944. As a young boy, John's father raised thorough-bred race horses. John competed in the county fair as a horse jockey, that is until he reached the teenage years when his feet outgrew the stirrups.

Upon graduation, John joined the U.S. Navy, serving during World War II. He was stationed as a seaman guard aboard a Liberty Ship, S.S. Charles H. Windham. During his service, John's ship brought supplies around the world. He landed in Calcutta, India on VE Day, where he celebrated with his childhood friend, Tom Fifield.

After serving his country, John attended Oceanside Junior College where he played football before transferring to his father's Alma Matter, the University of Southern California. During college, he and his brother, Stephen, would alternate attendance at USC between helping their father on the farm and attending school. John later became a trustee of USC serving for many years.

One of John's lifelong friends that he met in college, Howard Chastain, invited John to his parent's home for dinner one day. Upon hearing how John had to go home and work and then come back to school, Thelma, Howard's mother, felt sorry for the two country brothers. In an effort to help, Thelma would wash their clothes and darn their socks. Sometime later, Howard's parents were invited to a housewarming party at John Elmore Sr.'s San Clemente Ranch house and were dumbfounded that these brothers were not a couple of country bumpkins. A common interest in horses was discovered that resulted in a partnership in a special grey filly. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship for John and Howard's parents as well.

In 1949 John fell in love. Although they both grew up in Brawley, Ann Elizabeth Kelley and John Elmore had rarely crossed paths. However, one day when John was at USC, a young girl came running up to him and introduced herself stating she was from Brawley too! He soon began courting the beautiful Ann Kelley and after a little over a year of dating, the two were married February 10, 1951. Married sixty-six years upon his death, John and Anabeth welcomed four children, Howard in 1953, twins Margaret and Richard were born in 1954, one day apart, and Kelley, born in 1955.

John considered his family his greatest accomplishment and he took great pride and enjoyment seeing them all together. He treasured each generation as they became involved in the family business.

John loved to travel but Africa was his favorite vacation destination of all. He loved hunting and enjoyed all of his trips with friends all over the world, but he visited Africa at least five times during his life.

His first visit to Africa came while with the Navy aboard his Liberty Ship. Anabeth joined John for his second visit for a big-game hunting trip. Enjoying the adventure so much, they next brought their sons, Howard and Richard when Howard had just finished his first year of college and Richard had just finished high school. John visited Africa two other times with friends, including a trip to Egypt for the USC Board of Trustees. His advice for anyone that asked about Africa was "Don't go to Africa if you can't afford to go again, because you will fall in love and want to go back."

Upon return from one of his safaris John was asked to share his stories with various groups around the valley. During one such presentation a Holtville farmer continually heckled John...his response was that the safari was less than his loss on 80 acres of lettuce that season. The Holtville farmer later apologized and asked for John to tell him more about his adventures.

John's other favorite trips were boating along the west coast. He was an owner of two large yachts, the MV Laura and the Horizons, and enjoyed taking his friends and family on trips. He loved scuba diving and spearfishing.

John was passionate about agriculture and a gifted innovator in the industry. Over the years, John worked and started numerous farming and farm-related ventures. Upon returning to Brawley, he and his brother rented ground from their father as well as developed ground outside the Imperial Valley including Quail Mesa, a long-term development lease of Indian reservation land which involved clearing and leveling the raw land, installation of roads and irrigation as their father and grandfather had done in the Imperial Valley. Eventually, when his father retired, John and Stephen took over as operators of the Elmore Company, until they later parted ways to take on their own ventures.

In addition to his produce growing ventures, one of John's most notable accomplishments was the creation of Sahara Packing with his brother, Stephen Elmore, Lou Hausmann and Gene Oswalt in 1968. Lou Hausmann was a longtime friend of John's; Lou's grandfather worked with John's father and the two boys spent a lot of time together during their youth. Lou also grew up packing cantaloupes with his other grandfather who had built the original packing shed where the future Sahara cooler was built.

Looking for partners, John and Stephen approached Lou about starting a fresh produce company. Lou then recruited Gene Oswalt for his salesmanship and the four partners started

Sahara. For John and Lou, Sahara was their passion; Stephen and Gene would ultimately separate from the company.

In 1970, John purchased property in the Santa Maria Valley and several years later in Lompoc, California which made Sahara a year-round shipper of lettuce and other commodities. John implemented many of the Imperial Valley conservation practices and other standard farming practices on his central coast ground. Conservation practices which farmers in Imperial Valley considered standard such as drop boxes, stake leveling and tiling were unfamiliar to farmers in the Santa Maria and Lompoc area.

An inspiring visionary, John revolutionized the melon packing process cutting average packing costs by 50 percent and improving quality. Buyers from the east coast even noticed blossoms were still on the melons when they arrived. By moving the entire operation to the field and allowing any farmer to grow melons, not just those that had access to a packing shed, John's vision expanded the melon industry in Imperial Valley.

John went against industry standard growing techniques by allowing his melons to grow as nature intended and not vine training.

Lou and John had great success with the Sahara Produce Company, but had some definite setbacks from the start. Their main crops were cantaloupe and head lettuce, and also grew honeydew and asparagus. Whenever John encountered a potential problem from the business dealing with an outside party, his solution often resulted in Sahara taking on the challenge themselves. From entering the cooler business to starting their own trucking company, Sahara was a player in each stage from growing to shipping produce worldwide with annual gross sales reaching \$50 million.

While farming in Imperial Valley, John purchased numerous acres north of Brawley next to the Salton Sea. He became frustrated when the local tile company could not tile his ground. From that frustration, John started Lidco, Inc. in 1950 hiring Willy Taylor to operate the company.

As with many of John's ventures, once he was involved in a business he was always looking for ways to improve and grow the business. Through Lidco's subsurface drainage innovation, the industry saw an increase in the speed of installation and a decrease in cost per acre. Investing his own time and money, John perfected the plastic tube in a continuous roll that today has become an industry standard.

John sold Lidco, Inc. during the 1990s to his nephew Jim Jameson, and the company is still owned by Jim and run by Willy's son, Carter Taylor.

John was an original thinker in all his business activities. A true steward of the land, John was one of the first to emphasize the necessity to farm with less water by using tail water for irrigation long before it became a common practice, making him a conservationist before it was mandatory.

John has been a continuous supporter of local organizations, agricultural boards and other ventures. He was a member of the Brawley Elks Club, in fact, John gifted the use of Sahara Packing to the Elks Club for their annual Cattle Call Dance for many years. John was an active member of Del Rio Country Club where he served as President, the Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers Association, and Brawley Stockmen's Club. John served as a board member of the Western Growers Association for over 25 years and was awarded their Award of Honor in 1998. He was a founding member of Rockwood Chemical Company and served on the board of directors of Crocker Bank and LTV Corporation, a public aviation company where he served with his close friend Paul Thayer, President of the company.

John was a faithful supporter of youth organizations actively participating in 4H Clubs, Future Farmers of America, Boys & Girls Club and provided countless college scholarships to graduating high school seniors.

Before his passing on August 29th, John was presented with his last award by the Brawley Chamber of Commerce. John was immensely honored to receive the Branding Iron Award in May, 2017.

Throughout his life, John Elmore exhibited great pride in his hometown of Brawley; he strived to continually develop a more efficient and profitable way of operating businesses and was an enthusiastic promotor of the Imperial Valley agricultural industry.

John Elmore enjoyed many accomplishments and through his success in business he shared his prosperity with the community he loved. John Jameson Elmore...Beloved by many, respected by an industry.