ConAgra closes its Hunt-Wesson plant in Helm — Fresno County, 2016

ConAgra Foods closed its Hunt-Wesson tomato paste plant in Helm, western Fresno County, in March 2016 — ten years after it had already scaled the same plant back to seasonal-only operation, and eight years before OFI's 2024 Firebaugh closure made Fresno County's second documented commodity-processing exit in this project's record.

102

Jobs eliminated, per press coverage of the company's state WARN filing.

2

Stages this closure took — downgraded to seasonal-only in 2006, closed outright in 2016 — a decade apart.

What happened

ConAgra Foods announced in early February 2016 that it would close its Hunt-Wesson tomato paste plant in Helm, a 29-acre site near Kamm and Del Norte avenues in western Fresno County, east of Highway 145. The plant had been built in 1990; in 2006, ConAgra had already shifted it from year-round to seasonal-only tomato processing, moving other production volumes to its Oakdale, California facility — a partial downgrade a full decade before the eventual full closure.

Press coverage of the company's state WARN filing put the toll at 102 employees, effective March 18, 2016, with some warehousing activity continuing through the following summer. A company spokesperson said only that "based on a careful evaluation of our plant network we have determined that it is necessary to close the plant in Helm, Calif." — no further detail on that evaluation was given in any source found.

Impact — what we know, and what we don't

- **Jobs:** 102, per press coverage of the WARN filing; this archive could not independently verify the filing against the official state WARN report, which does not cover a period this

far back.

- **Full-time/seasonal breakdown:** Sources disagree — one puts it at roughly 70 seasonal plus the rest full-time, another effectively inverts that split. Not resolved.
- **What happened to the site:** No source found describes what became of the 29-acre property after 2016.
- **What happened to the workers:** Not documented anywhere found.

Part of a larger pattern

Searching this project's four-county record for the 2000–2020 window — outside the 2020–2026 wave this project otherwise tracks — turned up four previously undocumented closures: **Land O'Lakes' Tulare cheese plant** (2010), **Dawn Foods' Modesto bakeries** (March 2012), **Patterson Vegetable Company** (June 2012), and this one (2016). It's also a second data point for a specific pattern: Hunt-Wesson/ConAgra and Olam/OFI are different companies, but both made a partial downgrade before a later full exit (ConAgra's 2006 seasonal-only shift before its 2016 closure; Olam's own 2019 scale-back at Lemoore before OFI finally auctioned the site's equipment in 2023 — see **the OFI Firebaugh case study**) — the same two-stage retreat showing up independently at two different companies, a decade apart, in the same county.

Sources

- Just-Food, ConAgra Helm plant closure coverage (published 2016-02-01). Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- **HortiDaily, "US (CA): ConAgra to close Helm tomato processing plant, lay off 102 workers"** (published 2016-02-03).
- **Food Business News, "ConAgra to close California tomato paste plant."**

Full citation detail and source archive: **Data**. Back to **all case studies**.