Safeway closes its Hanford milk plant — Kings County, 1993

Safeway closed its cottage-cheese plant on Fifth Street in Hanford in March 1993 — the oldest Kings County closure in this project's record, three decades before the Olam, Del Monte, and Leprino closures that otherwise anchor this county's case studies, and the first evidence that this county's "compounding closures, same towns" pattern isn't a 2020s phenomenon.

36

Jobs eliminated when the plant's cottage-cheese line closed, March 1993.

89

Years between the 1904 farmers' creamery that founded this site and its final 1993 closure.

What happened

A group of Kings County dairy farmers formed the Lucerne Cream and Butter Co. in 1904; Safeway bought their small Fifth Street plant in March 1929. The site then had two separate, decades-apart end points. The original 1929 building made butter until 1931, when that work moved to other Safeway plants, then switched to evaporated milk — a line that ran until 1983, when a declining market forced it to shut down. A newer building Safeway put up on the same site in 1946 made buttermilk and cottage cheese; that's the line that closed in March 1993, when Safeway's chief buyer for the plant's cottage cheese, the Vons supermarket chain, found another processor and considered making its own in-house. "We couldn't justify keeping that plant under the Safeway banner," a company spokesman said. The plant's 36 employees, Teamsters members with severance in their contracts, had first priority for other openings in the company; their last workday was likely March 26, 1993.

The "Lucerne" name didn't disappear — Safeway still sells dairy products under that brand today, more than a century after the farmers who founded it.

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

- **Jobs:** 36, per the Hanford Sentinel's contemporaneous front-page coverage.
- **What became of the Fifth Street building after 1993:** not found in any source checked.
- **Whether Vons ever brought cottage-cheese production in-house:** not found in any source checked.

Part of a larger pattern

The same Hanford Sentinel article names this as the latest in a local trend: two Hanford/Lemoore grain mills, DeRaad Feed and George Verhoeven Feed, had already closed within the previous year (12 and 13 jobs respectively, both citing competition from larger, more modern Tulare County mills), alongside a five-and-dime chain's local stores. The article's own closing line is worth citing directly, because it describes exactly the dynamic this project otherwise has to argue for: "Countering the wave of closures are plans to start new operations in the county... Wal-Mart, Seward Luggage Company and Western Drum, and... the Hanford Mall." Dairy and grain-milling jobs, replaced by retail — in 1993, not as a retrospective interpretation.

This also pushes Kings County's documented closure history back to the same year, 1993, that this project separately found a Stanislaus County cluster (see **ConAgra's Banquet plant in Turlock**) — two different counties, the same hard year for Central Valley commodity processing, found independently rather than assumed. Kings County's other four closures — **Olam's Lemoore tomato plant** (2020), **Lacey Milling Co.** (2023), **Del Monte's Hanford tomato plant** (2024), and **Leprino Foods' Lemoore East plant** (2025–26) — all land thirty years or more later.

Sources

- The Hanford Sentinel, front page, Fri 8 Jan 1993, "Safeway plant may close" (byline Robert Monroe). Access: offline-archival — holding: newspaper microfilm, repository not yet confirmed; locate the reel through the California Newspaper Project catalogue (see **Data**).
- The Hanford Sentinel, front page, Fri 3 Apr 1992, "Mill shakeup continues: DeRaad shifts production" (byline Mark Pratter). Access: offline-archival — holding: newspaper microfilm, repository not yet confirmed; locate the reel through the California Newspaper Project catalogue (see **Data**).

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