Tagus Ranch's raisin plant closes near Tulare — Tulare County, 1991

Tagus Ranch Packing Company's raisin-packing plant closed on March 31, 1991, laying off 60 workers — the quiet last act of a once-world-class fruit empire, and a rare case in this project where a highway, not an agricultural market, is the named cause of decline.

60

Workers laid off when the plant closed as planned, March 31, 1991.

12

Worker camps Tagus Ranch once housed on the property, at its height one of the largest fruit-growing operations in the world.

What happened

Tagus Ranch was founded in 1912 by Hulett C. Merritt, who came west to build a second fortune after striking it rich in U.S. Steel. At its height, the ranch grew peaches, apricots, prunes, boysenberries, and cotton, housing its field-worker crews in twelve wood-and-adobe camps spread across the property — and it was more than a farm: a restaurant and hotel made it "a lively stop for travelers" on Highway 99. The ranch's fortunes declined as more restaurants opened in Visalia and Tulare and, decisively, as Interstate 5 diverted north-south traffic away from Highway 99 — an infrastructure cause, not a market one, that's distinct from the agricultural-economics explanations behind most of this project's other closures. By 1991, the raisin-packing plant was apparently the last significant piece of the once-sprawling operation still running. The plant had been for sale for a couple of months before the closure; company officials declined to give a specific reason beyond "a lot of different reasons," and no union represented its 60 employees.

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

- **Jobs:** 60, per the Tulare Advance-Register's contemporaneous front-page coverage.
- **Whether the plant reopened under new ownership:** not documented in any source found.

- **What became of the broader Tagus Ranch property — the restaurant, hotel, and worker camps:** not documented in any source found.

Part of a larger pattern

This is the earliest commercial closure documented anywhere in Tulare County's record in this project, a year before **Kraft's Louis Rich turkey plant** closed nearby — meaning the county's two oldest documented closures land within a year of each other, matching the "compounding closures" shape found independently in Kings and Stanislaus counties for the same general period. In scale and arc, Tagus Ranch's eight-decade run from a spectacular founding to a quiet exit echoes **Lacey Milling Co.'s** 136-year run in Hanford — far smaller at its peak, but the same shape of a long-running local institution eventually closing out.

Sources

- The Tulare Advance-Register, front page + p. 6, Wed 13 Feb 1991, "Tagus plant may close" (byline Vicki Mailes). 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**.