Kraft closes its Louis Rich turkey plant — Tulare County, 1992

Kraft General Foods closed its Louis Rich turkey-processing plant in Tulare on May 22, 1992, laying off 1,400 people — the largest single closure documented anywhere in Tulare County in this project, and the first precise, sourced number this project has for how much of a plant's workforce actually lived in the town where it operated.

1400

Employees who lost their jobs — "1,400 people looking for 200 jobs," in one worker's words at the time.

22%

Share of the 1,400 who actually lived in Tulare — the rest commuted in from surrounding towns.

What happened

Kraft General Foods announced on December 5, 1991 that its Louis Rich turkey-processing plant in Tulare would close, effective May 22, 1992. The closure eliminated 1,400 jobs — and Kraft's own VP of corporate communications told the Tulare Advance-Register that only about 22% of those workers, roughly 308 people, actually lived in Tulare itself, with the large majority commuting in from surrounding towns. Workers received severance, and Kraft said it would help them find other jobs; local reaction was bleak. One employee planned to apply to the postal service; a machine operator earning $7.60 an hour with good benefits expected to find only $5 to $5.50 an hour elsewhere.

The building didn't stay closed. Kraft itself later converted it to cheese production — mozzarella and parmesan — though no source found gives the conversion date. Kraft Heinz eventually sold its natural, grated, cultured, and specialty cheese businesses, including this plant, to France's Lactalis Group, forming Lactalis Heritage Dairy; the Tulare site employed about 250 people as of a February 2022 article announcing Lactalis's plans to expand it.

A separate, nearby thread in Tulare's dairy-processing history is worth naming alongside this one, though it isn't a closure: Land O'Lakes sold two of its three Tulare sites to Saputo Cheese USA in 2007 (~$216 million), while keeping its third, a plant that this project's **2010**

Land O'Lakes case study documents idling its cheese line separately. One of the two buildings Saputo acquired later changed hands again, bought by Marquez Brothers, a Hispanic cheese maker, in 2026 — Saputo itself remains Tulare's largest employer, with 900 workers across its remaining plants even after that consolidation. It's the clearest example in this project of real industrial churn that isn't a net exit: one building, two ownership changes, two decades, and the town's dominant employer growing throughout.

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

- **Jobs:** 1,400, confirmed directly against the Tulare Advance-Register's own December 1991 front-page coverage.
- **Local residency:** 22% (~308 of 1,400), per Kraft's own spokesperson at the time — the first precise figure this project has for commuting patterns at a single plant.
- **Exact date of the later turkey-to-cheese conversion:** not found in any source checked.

Part of a larger pattern

This closure fills what had been a genuine gap in this project's record — Tulare County's 1990–2000 decade search had turned up nothing until this. It lands a year after **Tagus Ranch's raisin plant** closed nearby, the county's two oldest documented closures within a year of each other. It's also a "second life" story, similar in shape to **Foster Farms Turlock's** purchase by Diestel Family Ranch and **Hershey Oakdale's** purchase by Sconza Chocolates — closed, repurposed, sold, and expanded, rather than left vacant.

Sources

- The Tulare Advance-Register, front page, Fri 6 Dec 1991, "Closing hits many hard: Louis Rich workers look to an uncertain future" (byline Vicki Mailes). Access: offline-archival — holding: newspaper microfilm, repository not yet confirmed; locate the reel through the California Newspaper Project catalogue (see **Data**).
- The Business Journal (Fresno), "French group buys Kraft Cheese division, including Tulare plant." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- The Sun-Gazette, "World's leading cheese company to expand Kraft plant in Tulare" (2022-02-25). Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.

- Land O'Lakes, February 2007 8-K/press release; Saputo newsroom, acquisition announcement (closed 2007-04-02); The Sun-Gazette, "Hispanic cheese maker buys Tulare plant" (2026-06-02). Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.

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