The world's largest olive cannery closes, reopens twice, and still hasn't come all the way back — Lindsay, Tulare County, 1992

Lindsay Olive Growers' cannery was, at its peak, the largest olive-packing operation in the world, and gave the town of Lindsay the nickname it still uses: the Olive Capital of the World. It closed in 1992, after its own neighbors sued over the brine in its wastewater and won. In the thirty-plus years since, the same plant has been reopened twice under two different names and closed both times, and this project could not confirm the second reopening ever actually happened.

500

Peak employment at Lindsay Olive Growers' cannery, when it was the largest olive-packing operation in the world.

3

Separate attempts to run this same plant since 1992, under three different names — the third of which we could not confirm ever opened.

What happened

Lindsay Olive Growers' cannery closed in 1992 after local landowners sued over brine in its wastewater and won; a state water-board cease-and-desist order followed, compounding financial strain the company was already under from crop freezes and mounting legal costs. The closure ended operations that had, at their height, made Lindsay's plant the largest olive-packing operation in the world and earned the town its "Olive Capital of the World" identity. The Lindsay Olive brand name was later sold to Bell-Carter Foods, which the trade press describes as the largest table-olive producer in the United States.

The physical plant did not stay closed. In 1996, a businessman named Mort Console began pursuing the site; he acquired it in 1997, and in 1998 the new venture, operating as Console Foods, received a $10 million USDA loan guarantee to reopen it as a frozen-vegetable processing plant — a different product line from the original olive cannery. The USDA subsequently cut the guarantee to $7.9 million and barred the funds from being used as

working capital. The plant reopened in January 1999 and closed again by June 1999, roughly six months later, with about 450 workers losing their jobs. Lender Hibernia Bank of Louisiana foreclosed on the property; Mort Console personally bought it back at a public auction on the Tulare County Courthouse steps, not through a corporation.

A third attempt followed. By March 2004, a new entity, Lindsay Foods LLC, was in contact with the city about restarting production at the same site, again as a frozen-vegetable plant. City Manager Scot Townsend told the City Council the company planned to begin hiring in May 2004 and projected employment estimates that ranged, across different officials' statements, from 350 to 500 workers within six months. By July 2004, the planned opening was stalled by a wastewater problem — the same category of issue, though not confirmed to be the same specific problem, that had contributed to the original 1992 closure — and no firm timetable had been set. We found no source confirming whether Lindsay Foods LLC ever actually began production. As of a 2021 Sun-Gazette retrospective on Lindsay's olive history, the plant was described as vacant, occupying a full city block at North Westwood Avenue and West Tulare Road, standing as "a reminder of the town's olive past."

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

- **Employment at closure (1992):** Not specified in the sources reviewed for this pass; the ~500 figure describes peak historical employment, not the headcount at the moment of the 1992 closure specifically.
- **Console Foods employment (1999):** About 450 workers, per contemporaneous Sun-Gazette coverage, lost their jobs when the plant closed roughly six months after reopening.
- **Lindsay Foods LLC (2004):** Projected hiring of 350 to 500 workers was reported, but we could not confirm the plant ever reopened under this name, how many (if any) were actually hired, or when or whether this third attempt itself ended.
- **Current status of the site:** Described as vacant as of 2021. We have not confirmed its status since.
- **Relationship to the 1991 regional freeze:** A statewide freeze in December 1991 devastated Tulare County's citrus crop and darkened nine Lindsay packing houses (see the **Home page** for that broader event). We found no source tying that freeze directly to Lindsay Olive Growers' 1992 closure, which our sources attribute specifically to the wastewater lawsuit, prior mismanagement, and foreign competition. We treat these as two real, contemporaneous but separately caused events, not one chain.

Part of a larger pattern

This is a different kind of case study than most of this project's closures: not one company exiting once, but one physical plant failing to restart three separate times under three different names and, in two of the three cases, two entirely different business models (olive canning, then frozen vegetables). **LoBue Bros.**, an 83-year-old independent citrus packer a few blocks away, explicitly credited its own business with having "filled a gap in Lindsay's economy" left by Lindsay Olive's departure (and General Cable's, a non-agricultural employer) before LoBue itself closed in 2017. This plant's history is also distinct from, and should not be confused with, a separate water-contamination case in the same town: the 2008–2024 perchlorate lawsuit against SQM North America, which concerned a drinking-water well, not this cannery's own wastewater discharge. Both are real, both are Lindsay, and they are not the same case. **The SQM case, at a level of court detail this project's other litigation references mostly lack:** the City of Lindsay filed suit in Tulare County Superior Court in October 2011; the case was removed to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California (Fresno Division) at the defendants' request; a jury found for SQM North America on May 17, 2018; the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered a retrial on February 6, 2020; and the case ultimately settled for $9.5 million, announced September 9, 2024.

Sources

- The Sun-Gazette (Tulare County), 18 March 2004, "Console to reopen as Lindsay Foods, LLC." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- The Sun-Gazette (Tulare County), 7 July 2004, "More than 300 local jobs held in legal limbo." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- The Sun-Gazette (Tulare County), 30 June 2021, "Growers help Lindsay reconnect with its olive roots." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- The Sun-Gazette (Tulare County), 9 August 2017, "LoBue packing house legacy ends after 83 years." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- **The Recorder (Tulare County), "Lindsay suing fertilizer company for tainted well."**
- **The Recorder (Tulare County), "Lindsay receives $9.5 million to clean drinking water."**

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