# Prima Wawona closes its Cutler packing house — Tulare County, 2024

Prima Wawona, one of California's largest stone-fruit growers and packers, shut down its Cutler packing house in March 2024 as part of a company-wide bankruptcy liquidation — eliminating the single largest documented job loss in this project's record, in a town where the plant once employed nearly twice the local population.

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Jobs eliminated company-wide, per the CEO's own layoff letter — 3,743 of them seasonal farmworkers.

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Counties losing a packing house in the same liquidation — Cutler (Tulare County) and Reedley (Fresno County).

## What happened

Prima Wawona — formed in a 2019 merger of Gerawan Farming and Wawona Packing, engineered by private-equity owner Paine Schwartz Partners and valued at roughly $1 billion at the time — filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on October 13, 2023, carrying more than $600 million in debt. Court documents cited mismanagement, a poor grasp of the volatile tree-fruit industry, and high-priced consultants "either performing poorly or doing nothing at all." An initial restructuring attempt sought a buyer at a $275 million minimum bid; none of seven potential bidders met it. By early December 2023, lenders — led by Metropolitan Life, the largest creditor — were pushing for outright liquidation instead.

CEO John Boken notified the workforce on January 12, 2024 that employment would end by March 12. The company's own filing put the toll at 5,411 regular employees, 3,743 of them seasonal farmworkers — about seven in ten of the total. The company operated packing houses in Reedley (Fresno County) and Cutler (Tulare County). The Cutler facility — a 300,000-square-foot packing house and cold-storage plant on Avenue 408 — sat idle during harvest season for the first time in decades; Cutler has about 4,400 residents, and the plant had once employed nearly double that figure. Wawona Frozen Foods, a separately owned Clovis company despite the similar name, was not part of the bankruptcy.

Alongside the workforce wind-down, the company moved to sell off 13,000–16,466 acres of farmland (sources disagree on the exact figure), valued at roughly $370 million and concentrated in east Fresno County with some parcels near Kerman. Pearson Realty, handling the Fresno-area sales, received more than 40 offers within three weeks. Sun Pacific and Moonlight Companies jointly bought 5,000 of those acres for $91 million; more than 90% of the farmland had sold within a few months. The Cutler packing house itself was separately listed for sale through Schuil Ag Real Estate, with no buyer confirmed as of the most recent reporting found.

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

- **Jobs:** 5,411 company-wide, per the company's own filing — the largest single documented job loss in this project's entire four-county record, exceeding even Patterson Vegetable's 1,015 (Stanislaus, 2012). No source found breaks that total down by site (Cutler vs. Reedley vs. other locations).
- **No official WARN filing found:** unlike every other 2024-2026 closure in this project's record, a direct search of the official California WARN PDF archive (`raw-data/warn-notices/FY2023-2024.pdf` and `FY2024-2025.pdf`) turned up no filing under "Prima Wawona," "Wawona," "Gerawan," "Cutler," or "Reedley." This is a real, confirmed gap, not an uncollected one — the layoffs are extensively documented in company statements and news reporting, but this project could not independently verify them against the primary state record the way it has for every other recent closure.
- **Indirect impact beyond the 5,411:** local officials estimated the layoffs could affect as many as 10,000 people in total, counting farm-labor contractors and other indirectly employed workers not captured in the direct layoff count.
- **Worker assistance:** California's EDD awarded $7 million to La Cooperativa Campesina de California to help laid-off farmworkers; state legislators held a town hall in March 2024 covering unemployment claims, career counseling, job training, and food/housing access.
- **What happened to the Cutler building:** Still being marketed for sale as of the most recent reporting found — no buyer confirmed.

## Part of a larger pattern

This closure sits inside the same 2024 wave this project documents elsewhere — **OFI's Firebaugh closure** (Fresno County, 275 jobs) and **Tropicale Foods' Modesto closure** (Stanislaus County) both landed the same year — but at a different scale entirely: Prima Wawona's 5,411

jobs dwarf every other single closure this project tracks. It's also evidence that the compounding pattern isn't confined to canneries and dairy plants — fresh-fruit packing, a distinct part of the same commodity-ag processing economy, is exiting the Central Valley too, and on an even larger scale.

## Sources


- **Fresh Fruit Portal, "Prima Wawona sells farmland, announces massive layoffs"** (Jan. 31, 2024).
- The Sun-Gazette (Mid Valley Times), "Farmworker town loses long-time employer" (April 2024). Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- **Yahoo News, "Massive fruit grower bankrupt in Fresno, 5,400 jobs lost. Who gets 16K acres prime farmland?"**
- **ABC30, "Resources being offered for Prima Wawona employees as layoffs near."**
- **Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula's office, March 2024 town hall announcement.**
- California EDD WARN report, checked directly: no filing found under Prima Wawona, Wawona, Gerawan, Cutler, or Reedley in the FY2023-2024 or FY2024-2025 archives. Access: obtained — taken directly from the agency's own filings rather than from a web page.


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