

About Sutter County



A traditional "push in" ceremony to put a brand new fire engine into service at Station 8 on Barry Road south of Yuba City.

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Sutter County is one of California's original 27 counties. Agricultural and commercial operations in Sutter County pre-date California's entry into the United States. While its borders have changed somewhat since its founding (Auburn was once the County seat), Sutter County's chief economy remains agriculture, annually contributing approximately \$1 billion or more to the County's economy. As such, conservation of agricultural lands, and support for agriculture-related industries, remains a shared goal of its residents and its local government.

History

Sutter County is named after one of the state's more engaging and complex historical personalities, and an agricultural visionary. John Augustus Sutter, a German native born to Swiss parents, was one of the first to recognize the Sacramento Valley for its potential as an agricultural empire. His Hock Farm, established on the Feather River just south of present-day Yuba City, was the site of the valley's first large agricultural enterprise.

At the age of 31, Sutter left Europe on a French passport and traveled a circuitous route that took him from New York to St. Louis to Oregon to Hawaii and then to Alaska. He sailed from Sitka, Alaska to Yerba Buena (San Francisco), arriving on July 1, 1839, at a time when California was part of Mexico. Sutter took Mexican citizenship on August 29, 1840 and between 1841 and 1844 was granted by Mexican authorities some 145,000 acres of land in the Sacramento Valley, including a portion he named New Helvetia that included parts of present-day Sutter County. On some 600 acres along the Feather River in 1841, Sutter established Hock Farm, the first non-Indian settlement in the area. It became the site of a large grain, orchard, cattle and vineyard operation.

Yuba City, the County seat, was founded in 1849, on the Feather River across from the mouth of the Yuba River. It is the birthplace of John Joseph Montgomery (February 15, 1858), the first American to build and pilot an airplane, on August 28, 1883, 20 years before Orville and Wilbur Wright. Montgomery is considered the Father of Aviation.

The world's largest earth-moving equipment manufacturer, Caterpillar, traces its roots back to Sutter County. Daniel Best, who designed tractors on his brother Henry's farm in the 1860s, founded the Best Tractor Co., which merged with Holt Tractor out of the Stockton area, to form Caterpillar.

Geography

Located in the heart of the Sacramento Valley, Sutter County's southern border is Sacramento County. It is bordered on the southwest by Yolo County, the northwest by Colusa County, on the north by Butte County, on the east by Yuba County, and on the southeast by Placer County. Sutter County is the only Sacramento Valley County with its boundaries located entirely on the floor of the valley.

Sutter County has a land mass of just over 600 square miles, 88 percent of which is prime farm or grazing lands. Just three percent of the County is urbanized.

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State highways 99 and 20 are the main traffic arteries through Sutter County, linking the County to Interstate 80 to the south and Interstate 5 to the west. The highways intersect at Yuba City, 45 miles north of the state capital.

The Sacramento River watershed drains an area the size of West Virginia, and most of that water passes by, or through, Sutter County. The watershed has provided rich soils and vast amounts of water for agriculture and industry, but its capacity to flood poses a physical and economic threat to communities in Sutter County. The County's battles with flooding are historic. Sutter County is the site of the first regional flood mitigation effort in California—Levee District 1, created by the Board of Supervisors in 1868. When 19th century hydraulic mining for gold in the Sierra Nevada choked the rivers with debris and made flooding episodes more frequent and more damaging, Sutter County farmers spearheaded the formation of the Sacramento Valley Anti-Debris Association to force an end to hydraulic mining. Sutter County is bisected by a state flood control project—the Sutter Bypass—which diverts high water flows from the Sacramento River and channels them south. There are approximately 260 miles of earthen levees in Sutter County. Flood mitigation is a constant priority for Sutter County government. In 2007, the County was instrumental in forming the Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency to provide regional flood mitigation efforts in the 21st century, in partnership with Butte County and the cities of Biggs, Live Oak, Gridley, and Yuba City, as well as Sutter County levee districts 1 and 9. This group of local government agencies operating under a joint powers agreement designed and constructed 44 miles of levee improvements to provide 200-year level flood protection at Yuba City and Live Oak, and 100-year level flood protection in most of the Yuba City basin. This project, which prevented a massive spike in flood insurance rates and threatened residential and commercial building throughout the Yuba City flood basin, was funded largely by funds from a state bond initiative with a local match funded by an assessment on properties benefitting from the flood mitigation work, following a property owner election approving creation of the assessment. When you look at the County and its five flood basins as a whole, sixty-eight percent of the County is in a state or federally designated flood plain, and residential and commercial development is impractical in those areas.

Sutter County is home to the Sutter Buttes, a cluster of mountain peaks rising in sharp relief to the flat landscape that dominates the Sacramento Valley. Seen for miles from every direction, the Sutter Buttes are the remnants of a volcano dormant for over a million years. Sometimes referred to as “The Smallest Mountain Range in the World,” they were known as *Histum Yani*, (variously translated as Middle Mountains of the Valley or Spirit Mountain) to the native Maidu who have occupied Sutter County for 10,000 years.

Climate

Like all regions with Mediterranean climate, Sutter County experiences relatively mild winters. Breezes from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta provide relief on many summer evenings. Sutter County has, on average, approximately 21 inches of rainfall each year. While temperatures sometimes exceed 100 degrees and infrequently fall below freezing, the average high temperature in July is 95 degrees and the average low temperature in January is 38 degrees. Snowfall is a rare occurrence, although it is less rare on the peaks of the Sutter Buttes.

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Population

According to the California Department of Finance, Sutter County had an estimated population of approximately 100,110 in 2024. More than two-thirds, 70,256, live in the City of Yuba City. Another 9,668 live in the City of Live Oak.

Government

Sutter County is a General Law County and is organized in accordance with the California Government Code and the California Constitution, with five elected members of the Board of Supervisors and elected positions of Assessor, Auditor-Controller, Clerk-Recorder/Registrar of Voters, District Attorney, Sheriff-Coroner and Treasurer-Tax Collector. The Board of Supervisors enacts local ordinances and establishes the policies under which the County operates. Based on these policy decisions, the County Administrator manages the activities of the County's departments. County Counsel provides legal counsel to the Board of Supervisors and the departments.

Agriculture

In 2022, Sutter County had 890 farms (a loss of 669 farms or a decrease of 43 percent since 2012), operating on 257,995 acres (99,179 fewer acres and a 28 percent decrease since 2012), according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service. The value of 2022 farm production was \$568,883 million, with rice, dried plums (prunes), walnuts, peaches, tomatoes, and nursery products as the leading agricultural commodities. The County also is an important producer of cattle and calves, melons, hay, and alfalfa.

Natural Gas Production

Falling prices and falling demand continue to impact Sutter County's significant natural gas industry, which is centered in the Sutter Buttes and the Meridian basin. Gas well assessed value has dropped from \$141 million in 2011 to an estimated \$14.5 million in 2022. Sutter County had approximately 407 natural gas wells in FY 2021-22, with less than 10 percent of them active. There haven't been any new wells added in the past five years.

Employment

Sutter County is part of the Yuba City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes all of Sutter County and all of neighboring Yuba County. More than one-third of Sutter County residents commute outside of the County for work. One in five people employed in the Yuba City MSA work for the federal, state, or local governments, including schools, or a special district or for a tribal government.

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The chart below represents the March 2024 estimated employment by Industry breakdown for the Yuba City MSA according to the California Employment Development Department.

Total All Employment	55,700
Government (incl. Education)	14,600
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	10,900
Private Education and Health Services	10,000
Retail Trade	6,200
Leisure and Hospitality	5,200
Farming	3,500
Professional and Business Services	3,700
Manufacturing	2,200
Mining, Logging & Construction	3,200
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	1,200
Information	200

The Yuba City MSA's single largest civilian employer is Adventist-Health Rideout, at approximately 2,000 employees. The largest category of employment is government (14,600), which includes 1,600 federal employees, 1,200 state employees, 7,800 employees in education, and 4,000 local government employees working in counties, cities, and special districts.