

A landscape photograph of Sutter County, California, featuring rolling hills, a river, and a sunset sky. The sky is filled with horizontal bands of orange, red, and purple, indicating a sunset. The hills in the background are covered in sparse vegetation and are silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, a river flows through a lush green valley, reflecting the colors of the sunset. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# ABOUT SUTTER COUNTY

Photo courtesy Jack Davis



# About Sutter County

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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. As such, conservation of agriculture remains a shared goal of its residents and its 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 vineyards operation.

Yuba City, the County seat, was founded in 1849, and is the birthplace of John Joseph Montgomery (February 15, 1858), the first American to pilot an airplane, on August 28, 1883, 20 years before Orville and Wilbur Wright. He 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.

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, along the Feather River at its confluence with the Yuba River.

The Sacramento River drainage system that has provided rich soils and vast amounts of water for agriculture and industry also poses a physical threat to communities in Sutter

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County. Sutter County's battles against flooding are historic. Sutter County is the site of the first regional flood control effort in California—Levee District 1, created by the Board of Supervisors in 1868. When 19<sup>th</sup> 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 control 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 control efforts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sutter County is home to the Sutter Buttes, a cluster of mountain peaks that rise 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 occupied Sutter County for perhaps as long as 10,000 years.

### Climate

Like all regions with Mediterranean climate, Sutter County experiences relatively mild winters. Summers in Sutter County can be warmer than other regions of the Sacramento Valley that are closer to the origin of the Delta breezes that provide

some relief in the 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.

### Population

According to the California Department of Finance, Sutter County has an estimated population of approximately 97,238 in 2018. More than two-thirds, 67,280, live in the City of Yuba City. Another 8,781 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, 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 2012, Sutter County had 1,358 farms (an eight percent increase over 2007) on 375,174 acres (a four percent increase over 2007), according to the U.S. Department of

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Agriculture. The value of 2016 farm production was \$514 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. Industries directly or indirectly tied to agriculture benefit from agricultural production, which returned more than \$2.4 billion to the local economy in 2013.

### 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 \$45 million in 2017.

Sutter County had approximately 414 natural gas wells in 2014/15 with 273 on idle status, while 141 were considered active.

### 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. Almost one in five people employed in the Yuba City MSA work for the federal, state, or local governments, including schools.

The chart below represents the April, 2018 Employment by Industry breakdown for the Yuba City MSA according to the Employment Development Department.

<b><i>Total All Employment</i></b>	49,300
Government	11,400
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	9,500
Educational and Health Services	8,400
Retail Trade	6,400
Leisure and Hospitality	4,400
Farming	5,000
Professional and Business Services	3,100
Manufacturing	2,300
Mining, Logging & Construction	2,300
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	1,400
Information	<u>300</u>

The Yuba City MSA’s single largest civilian employer is Rideout Health (2,100). The largest category of employment is government, including local government (8,800), which includes cities, counties, schools, and special districts.

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