

Grower Frank Sakata dies as car crashes

H. Frank Sakata, 76, head of one of the larger Pajaro Valley vegetable growing and shipping companies, died yesterday in a car accident in San Jose.

The California Highway Patrol in San Jose said Mr. Sakata was southbound on Highway 880 about 3:50 p.m. when his car drifted off the freeway just south of Highway 237 and hit a tree. Witnesses saw no brake lights, and he was driving about 50 mph, the CHP said. He was pronounced dead at 4:30 p.m. at San Jose Hospi-

tal. A coroner's examination is in progress, but CHP Officer Ernie Rascon said it was possible Mr. Sakata suffered a heart attack while he was driving.

Andy Vucinich, who went to school with Mr. Sakata and knew him professionally through his own work with J.J. Crosetti, said today, "He was a fine gentleman."

Mr. Sakata was born in Lompoc in 1912 and moved to Watsonville with his family in 1918. His parents established a

vegetable-growing company in 1920, which grew into the L&W Land Co. and Sakata Ranches Inc. Mr. Sakata was chairman of the boards of both companies.

Sakata Ranches raises vegetables, mostly lettuce, on 750 acres owned by the land company in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. George Sakata, Mr. Sakata's nephew and secretary of the corporations, said the company had \$4 million in sales last year and employed up to 100 people during the peak

season. The company also grows onions on about 160 acres near Ontario, Ore.

Ed Angstadt, president of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association in Salinas, said today, "He was a great old gentleman. He'd been through a lot. He really knew the industry and really developed the company."

Mr. Sakata lived in Watsonville most of his life. He graduated from Watsonville High School in 1930 and attended San Jose State University. During

World War II, he was interned for two years at Poston, Ariz., and between 1943 and 1958 lived in Ontario, Ore.

He was a lifelong member of Westview Presbyterian Church, which his parents helped found. He belonged to the Watsonville Rotary Club and the Japanese American Citizens League in Watsonville.

Mr. Sakata leaves his wife of 49 years, Virginia, of the family home on Cutter Drive; a son, Dr. Matthew Sakata, and

daughter-in-law, Gloria, of Kentfield; a daughter, Sandra Sakata, of San Francisco; two sisters, Fusako Ishizuka and Mary Matsushita, both of Watsonville; a brother, Tommy, of Watsonville; two grandchildren, Derrick and Theodora Sakata, of Kentfield; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Funeral arrangements are pending at Davis Memorial Chapel. Memorial contributions may be made to the memorial fund at Westview Presbyterian Church or to a favorite charity.