

Board of Supervisors approves nonprofit to distribute emergency water aid

By Andrew Kuhn
July 21, 2015



Calwater Drilling Co. employee Albert Munoz, 21, of Turlock, drills a new residential well at a home on Belmira Road in Atwater in June. A Visalia nonprofit, Self-Help Enterprises, has received approval to install and maintain emergency water distribution systems for Merced County residents whose wells have dried up

submit applications Aug. 1 – when the program is set to begin – to receive the water. Once the applications are submitted, the county will process them so Self-Help can begin to distribute the water.

County officials were unsure exactly when parched residents may receive any water.

WE ARE IN A CRUNCH. WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING NOW.

Deidre Kelsey, Merced County supervisor

At the Tuesday meeting, Adam Cox, executive director of the Builders Exchange of Merced and Mariposa, voiced concern with the county's proposal process in choosing a nonprofit. He said the county did not contact enough organizations for the program. Cox also was disappointed the county chose an organization from Visalia rather than a local nonprofit.

"There are several organizations in town that are capable of providing these services that were not contacted and would love an opportunity to give back to their community," Cox told the board.

Jim Brown, the county's CEO, said the county completed the proper request for qualifications process but moved swiftly on choosing a nonprofit as the board directed. Self-Help will subcontract with a local nonprofit, and the county is open to adding additional vendors as subcontractors, he said.

"We are trying to do our best job to balance that equation of get it done and stay local," Brown said.

Many of the supervisors agreed it was important to get the program up and running as soon as possible.

"We are in a crunch," Supervisor Deidre Kelsey said. "We need to do something now."

The Merced County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously approved allowing Self-Help Enterprises to install and maintain emergency water distribution systems for county residents whose wells have dried up.

Choosing a nonprofit to administer the funds was the latest step in the county's Emergency Water Distribution Plan. The plan authorizes a nonprofit to supply water to residents for health and safety purposes, according to Jeremy Rahn, the battalion chief for the county's Office of Emergency Services.

Merced County received 80 requests for well-drilling permits from mid-April to June, and some drillers reported wait lists up to 18 months long for a new well.

Self-Help will apply for state assistance to run the program through the California Disaster Assistance Act and the Governor's Office of Environmental Services.

Rahn said he spoke to about 35 people who plan to