

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FINANCE

California Nonprofit Shows Its Strength

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Self-Help Enterprises creates both rental and homeownership opportunities for families and farmworkers in California's San Joaquin Valley. In 2017, the nonprofit had a busy year, starting construction on nine developments with 156 affordable homes.



Tom Collishaw, president and CEO, Self-Help Enterprises

The 53-year-old nonprofit focuses its work in eight counties—Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Stanislaus, and Tulare. “We’ve stuck to our knitting and still serve a specific footprint that we know well and that we’re known well in,” says Tom Collishaw, president and CEO.

With much of the organization’s work in the agriculturally rich Central Valley, about 75% of Self-Help Enterprises’ new construction developments are occupied by farmworker families.

In a show of the organization’s increasing emphasis on energy efficiency, the nonprofit recently completed a zero-net energy retrofit of an approximately 30-year-old farmworker housing project that was financed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Sec. 514 program. Located in a remote region of Madera County, the 56-unit Casas de la Vina underwent major energy improvements, including the installation of solar panels, low-flow water fixtures, LED lighting, and new windows.

“All the improvements make it truly net-zero energy,” Collishaw says. “To our knowledge, it is the first time that anybody has done that with an older farmworker housing project with rental assistance.”

The organization also broke ground on two new rental communities last year—the 44-unit Sierra Village in Dinuba and the 50-unit Palm Terrace in Lindsay. Both will be completed this year.

Both properties use low-income housing tax credits, but the driving piece of funding comes from the state Cap-and-Trade Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program, which provides financing to projects that will reduce carbon emissions. Sierra Village received about \$4.4 million and Palm Terrace received about \$5.5 million in cap-and-trade funds.

This year, Collishaw and his team is seeking financing for more than 300 new multifamily units in six projects. The organization’s roots are in homeownership, and that remains part of its DNA so it will also try to build out about 85 single-family homes.