

# THE MODESTO BEE

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## Central Valley wells are going dry in this drought. How to get free help

July 29, 2022

By: Garth Stapley



What a helpful government service, I thought as I read a San Joaquin County press release on options available to people there if their water wells go dry.

I wish we had something like that here in Stanislaus County, I added to myself — 2,500-gallon tanks of water for bathing, flushing toilets and doing dishes, delivered to rural San Joaquin homes; bottled drinking water, also delivered to their doorsteps; well testing; financial help to drill a new well. All for free.

Then I started wondering if domestic wells are going dry here, too, like they did in droves during a similar drought in 2014, particularly around Oakdale, Valley Home, Waterford, Turlock and Denair (people on city water aren't affected). My colleague, former reporter Joanne Sbranti, did lots of stories then about huge industrial wells sucking groundwater relied on by scores of small, private wells nearby, and I did a few, too.

First, wells sure enough are going dry up and down California — 185 in the past month, 948 in the past year, the state reports. Those totals actually are not as bad as last year, when the current drought was ramping up, but way worse than 2017-2020, when hardly any wells dried up.

Locally, five Stanislaus wells went dry in the past month, among 15 in the past year. That may not sound like a ton, but if your family suddenly is without water, it can be frightening. It certainly is inconvenient.

Things are worse in neighboring Merced County, where 41 wells dried up in the past year, and in San Joaquin County, where 22 did. Worst in the state is Fresno, with 208 in the past year.

#### HELP FOR DRY WELLS

So the life-altering menace of wells going kaput, apparently, is again rearing its ugly head. Things could get worse if the drought hangs on, and will get way worse as the climate changes.

Wanting to know more, I called Self-Help Enterprises, the organization contracting with government to ease people's burdens. It was good to learn that temporary clean-water services also are available in Stanislaus and Merced counties — and everywhere else across the San Joaquin Valley. For more information, see [selfhelpenterprises.org](http://selfhelpenterprises.org) or call 559-651-1000.

“As the drought continues to worsen, we appreciate the opportunity to remind people” about free services, Melissa Looney, Self-Help's tanks and hauled-water manager, told me. Dried-up wells “absolutely is a thing all throughout the state,” she said.

Why does it seem the word isn't getting out?

Vague descriptions can be found in links on Stanislaus County Office of Emergency Services' website, if someone is willing to dig (see “Drought Resources” on OES' main page, then “Self-Help Resources” at the bottom).

It would be more helpful, however, if officials would do some sort of public education campaign, or find an effective way to highlight available services without forcing people to click around. Like both of our neighbors have.