



Rural Development • Rural Utilities Service • Household Water Well System Grant

Partnering for Resilience: Helping Rural Families Keeps Homes and Water in California

California is parched. Amidst the controversy over irrigation in the farms of the Central Valley, the regulations on lawn sprinklers in sprawling cities, and the headlines about groundwater laws, there are regular people with no water. Imagine that day, only a few months after you’ve moved into your new house, when you turn on the tap but not a single drop of water comes out of your faucet. And you have to figure out what to do.

“It’s not the city or the town or the community water district. It’s you,” said Cynthia Elliott, Loan Officer for Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC). RCAC received \$554,000 over the past two years from USDA Rural Development through the Household Water Well System Grant (HWWS) program specifically to solve that problem for families all across California. They use the funding to help pay for re-drilling wells that can cost an average of \$20,000, with drilling wait lists of up to a year. There are also folks who often do not report their dry wells to the county either, for fear of having their houses condemned.

For the family with five children outside of Hughson, in Stanislaus County, losing water at their new house meant buying gym memberships at \$10 a month so that everyone could take showers. The family had spent all of their savings on the down payment for the house, and didn’t have anywhere else to turn. A HWWS loan from RCAC allowed them to re-drill their well—after six months of waiting for an available well driller.

For the disabled Mr. Carmen and Mrs. Antonia Puga, and their three young grandchildren, from the outskirts of Visalia in Tulare County, losing water meant hiring a water pump company to extend the pipe deeper into the well—until the well went dry again, only a few months later. Instead of water, it only pumped up sand and mud. Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) helped the Puga family re-drill their well to 300 feet, leveraging funds from HWWS with SHE’s revolving loan fund and USDA’s Housing Preservation Grant (HPG) program. Over the past two years, SHE has received \$300,000 through HWWS to help people just like Mr. and Mrs. Puga.

Across the state, over the last two years more than \$1 million in HWWS funding has allowed RCAC, SHE and the California Rural Water Association to help low-income families, the disabled and the elderly re-drill dry wells in rural communities. During that time, RCAC helped 32 households and SHE assisted 15 households. Through HWWS, the nonprofits have developed good relationships with well drillers, which in some cases have reduced wait time to a couple months. Their efforts haven’t stopped the drought from happening, but they have made it a little easier to live with.

“We are making progress,” said Julie Cabañas, Senior Loan Processor for Self-Help Enterprises. “It’s good to see that temporary water tank being removed from the property. It’s because they don’t need it anymore.”

Obligation Amount: \$300,000 grant - Self-Help Enterprises
\$554,000 grant - Rural Community Assistance Corporation
\$230,461 grant - California Rural Water Association

Date of Obligation: Fiscal Year 2014 and 2015 combined

Congressional District: Statewide

Partners: Rural Community Assistance Corporation; Self-Help Enterprises; California Rural Water Association

Impact: Repairing and redrilling domestic wells across California