

Well went dry last Easter, but one Kingsburg man gets blessed with new water supply

By Mark Grossi

Kingsburg resident Abelardo De Leon Garcia, 81, is happy he's getting a new well, being drilled Monday morning, March 9, 2015. His well went dry last July. He was able to get a federal grant for the work. Video by John Walker THEFRESNOBEE

KINGSBURG — At the usually quiet, rural home of Abelardo De Leon Garcia, a drilling machine hammered the sandy soil all morning Monday, creating a well shaft three times deeper than a dry well only a few yards away.

Garcia, 81, had lost his water well on Easter Sunday last year. Nearly a year later, his water supply has been resurrected, thanks to federal funding and a Visalia-based nonprofit called [Self-Help Enterprises](#).

"I was very worried," he said in Spanish, standing near the drilling site at his home of 33 years. "I didn't know how to keep going, and I was afraid I would have to move."

His story about losing his 84-foot-deep well last year is similar to hundreds of people — perhaps thousands now — in the San Joaquin Valley. These victims of the unrelenting four-year drought are scattered throughout Madera, Fresno, [Tulare](#) and Kern counties, as well as others.

The drought has forced increased groundwater pumping by farmers who are trying to save their crops. The pumping has made groundwater levels plummet, drying private wells at homes in farm country.

The crisis may be worse this summer. Reservoirs are low in this part of the state. [Pine Flat Reservoir](#) on the Kings River is holding only 17% of its capacity.

The [snowpack](#), which would usually add water to reservoirs in spring and summer, is smaller than it was at this time last year — less than a fifth of average for this point in March.

In small communities and rural homes, lives have been turned upside down. Many people living on fixed incomes, as Garcia does, desperately look for funding to replace their private wells.

Many people have resorted to using large water tanks equipped with small pump motors to get water into their homes. The tanks must be refilled periodically by trucks hauling water from cities.

Garcia, whose wife died a few years ago, is among the lucky ones who could rely on a neighbor for water, hooking up a hose to his plumbing while a relative looked for a solution.

The relative found Self-Help Enterprises, a community-building organization with deep roots in the Valley. Senior loan processor Julie Cabanas of Self-Help said Garcia's new, 250-foot-deep well costs more than \$20,000, and he needed assistance putting together the financing.

Self-Help worked with the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) to secure a \$7,500 grant for the work. The rest is covered with a zero-interest federal loan, she said.

"There are no monthly payments," Cabanas said. "The loan will become due whenever the house is sold in the future."

Garcia said the arrangement allows him to remain in his dream home, southwest of Kingsburg. His family of five

moved to the house in 1982 after living many years on a ranch where Garcia was a field worker.

He walked in his yard on Monday, glancing at vibrant orchards surrounding his home. He said other neighbors living in the area have lost wells in the last year, too. It was very unexpected, Garcia said.

“The old well needed a new motor once,” he said. “But I never worried about it running out of water.”

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