

# Residents Of Central Valley Farm Community Lose Water As Surrounding Orchards Bloom

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Joe Vasquez, KPIX

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FAIRMEAD (KPIX) — In the pre-dawn hours, just after 3 a.m., Girtha Williams is up, washing her dishes.

That's when the water runs at something more than a trickle in her home in the tiny Central Valley community of Fairmead.

"I feel better washing the dishes at 3 and 4 because the flow is better," Williams says.

Family wells are going dry here on the outskirts of this African-American community just off Highway 99, about an hour north of Fresno. Some residents have decided to dig deeper wells but about 40 homeowners just can't afford it.

For Girtha's daughter, Thelma, the lack of running water means she does laundry and showers at relatives' homes. She hauls drinking water in five-gallon containers.

Sometimes a friend, who lives a mile away, lets her use the hose to fill them up. Otherwise she has to buy water at the store.

"It's a very humbling experience," Thelma says.



(CBS)

Folks in Fairmead are among the hardest-hit victims of California's historic drought. They dread the continued expansion of one of the state's more controversial agriculture exports — almonds.

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“Every time you turn around someone is planting some more trees and digging a deeper well,” said Barbara Nelson, of Fairmead Community & Friends.

Fairmead is surrounded by nut trees, mostly almonds.

Farmers throughout California are cashing in on this lucrative but thirsty crop.

One day last June, when new trees were planted and a new well drilled, the Cooper family lost water pressure.

“[The well] went in and poof! No water. The water went completely out,” said Girtha Williams.

About 1700 wells have gone dry in towns up and down the Central Valley, according to the California Office of Emergency Services. But, with farmers under no legal obligation to stop planting or digging new wells, it’s not clear what can be done.

“Eventually I’m hoping someone will come in and help us sit at the table and see if we can make some kind of reconciliation — because it’s really, really horrible not to have water. It really is,” Thelma Williams said.

Help is on the way to Fairmead. State disaster assistance money will fund the installation of tanks for 17 homes where the wells have gone dry. They will also deliver drinking water but it’s only a temporary solution.