

THE FOOTHILLS SUN-GAZETTE

Digging up dollars for families

By Sun Gazette Staff

January 8, 2016



Pacific Western Bank and Rural LISC announced a \$1 million loan to Self-Help Enterprises last month as part of a collaborative effort to alleviate drought conditions in the San Joaquin Valley. Located in Visalia, Self-Help Enterprises will use the funds to provide low-income residents with permanent solutions including low-interest loans to drill a deeper or new well.

The funds originated from a 2015 California Organized Investment Network (COIN) CDFI Tax Credit Program award from the California Department of Insurance to Pacific Western Bank in early December. Pacific Western Bank will partner with Rural LISC to utilize the COIN tax credits through a below market investment. Self-Help Enterprises, a community development corporation (CDC), will receive the below market rate loan from Rural LISC to support its ongoing work to supply low-income families with safe drinking water in the drought-ravaged San Joaquin Valley.

“We are extremely grateful for the generous support and committed partnership of Pacific Western Bank,” said Suzanne

Anarde, Rural LISC program vice president. “Thanks to these resources, Rural LISC will be able to further its mission of creating healthy and vibrant rural communities.”

This collaboration exemplifies the essential role of Rural LISC, a community development financial institution (CDFI), which worked to create the loan arrangement, and will continue to monitor and report on its impact in rural communities.

Self-Help Enterprises has provided housing and community development services to low-income residents of the San Joaquin Valley for over 50 years. Serving eight counties in the Central Valley, where thousands of wells have run dry during the now four-year-old, record-breaking drought, Self-Help Enterprises has been at the forefront of drought relief efforts helping numerous low-income families in rural communities with temporary emergency assistance in the form of bottled water deliveries; 2,500-gallon tank installations and water delivery; and provisions for permanent solutions such as hooking up households to nearby municipal water lines, or in some cases, drilling new wells.

To support this process, Self-Help Enterprises has established the McAllister Fund that provides essential financial assistance to individuals and poor communities to address critical water needs.

“Because the cost for well replacement is expensive and affordable financing is not available, Self-Help Enterprises will offer families below market rate loans, coupled with other grants to finance the drilling of new and deeper water wells,” said Greg Sparks, Rural LISC Program Director. “With predictions of a wet winter ahead, there is a growing tendency to think that one year will solve the problem. But the work is not done. Water experts say that the root of much of the Valley’s problems – depletion of the groundwater – could take decades to remedy.”

So far this year, Self-Help Enterprises has placed 861 temporary storage tanks and pumps into homes that are receiving regular water deliveries; replaced 55 domestic wells; coordinated bottled water deliveries to 987 families; and extended new water lines to 105 homes.

Despite successes, critical gaps still remain – especially in resources that can pay for the replacement of existing wells where there is no other viable solution. Currently, 296 families are on a waiting list for new wells. Because of high demand for well drillers, the average cost of new domestic wells has risen to over \$25,000 per well.

Donations to further the efforts of Rural LISC and Self-Help Enterprises can be directed to: www.selfhelpenterprises.org .