A town of farmworkers, paying for water they won't drink — Cantua Creek, Fresno County

Cantua Creek is about as direct an example of this project's thesis as a water story gets: a town of fewer than 500 people, a majority of them farmworkers, about 40 miles southwest of Fresno — paying a water bill every month for water they don't trust enough to drink.

500

Cantua Creek's population — fewer than this, and majority farmworker, per Guardian reporting.

2018

Year new wells were first reported as pending for Cantua Creek — still pending as of the most recent reporting reviewed.

What happened

Cantua Creek's wells contain manganese, and while local reports have described the water as technically safe, residents say otherwise — one resident told reporters flatly, "we know it's contaminated." Households in the town, tied economically to the surrounding farmland, pay roughly $75 a month for water they use for bathing, dishes, and laundry but not for drinking or cooking; state funding helps some residents get 5-gallon jugs of water monthly, an amount residents say isn't enough, especially during the summer. New wells intended to fix the underlying problem have been described as pending since 2018, with no completion date confirmed in the reporting we reviewed.

Impact — what we know, and what we don't

- **Manganese levels and health risk specifics:** Not detailed in the sources reviewed — we have the contaminant identified, not the concentration or the regulatory threshold it exceeds.
- **Current status of the pending wells:** Unconfirmed. "Pending since 2018" is the most recent status we could verify; whether they've since been completed is not established.

- **Exact population and farm-labor share:** Reported as "fewer than 500" and "majority farm-worker town" by the Guardian; we don't have a precise census figure to pair with that characterization.

Part of a larger pattern

Cantua Creek is the plainest version of this project's water-and-labor thesis in the entire record: a town that exists because of farm labor, whose own water isn't safe to drink, where the gap between "pending" and "built" has already run several years. It belongs alongside **Lanare's** similarly drawn-out fix timeline and the broader regional pattern of small, disadvantaged water systems with no capacity to resolve contamination on their own.

Sources

- **KFF Health News (Harriet Blair Rowan), "A million Californians don't have clean drinking water. Where do they live?"** (June 28, 2019).
- **The Guardian (via Self-Help Enterprises), "'It smells bad': the US farmworkers grappling with unsafe water at home"** (Jan. 23, 2024).

Full citation detail and source archive: **Data**. Back to **water insecurity in the Central Valley**.