Black water from the tap — Stratford, Kings County

Stratford is a small, unincorporated farm town in western Kings County served by its own tiny public utilities district. Its water record is not one crisis but a recurring one: discolored, foul-smelling tap water in 2014, both of the town's wells failing years later, and a temporary fix that residents say still didn't make the water drinkable.

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Wells serving Stratford — both failed in the same documented episode, cutting the town off from its own water supply.

$80

Approximate monthly water bill one Stratford family reported paying — for water they boiled and flavored before drinking.

What happened

In May 2014, Stratford residents reported tap water that had turned black and brown, smelled of rotten eggs, and visibly carried dirt — water they said they could taste in their food and were afraid to drink or bathe in. The Stratford Public Utilities District called the discoloration a result of natural minerals, said the water met state standards, and flushed the system; it also said the district normally flushed more often but had cut back during drought. Years later, both of the town's wells failed outright, and residents were told the town was likely to be without water for the rest of the week; a subsequent emergency fix left the water, by residents' own account, still not drinkable. The town has since received funding for a new well and expanded water delivery — but the underlying pattern, of a small, under-resourced utility district running a town's entire water supply on a handful of aging wells, is the same one documented across the rest of this record.

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

- **Cause of the 2014 discoloration:** Disputed. The utility district attributed it to natural mineral content and drought-reduced flushing; residents experienced it as a water-safety failure regardless of the technical explanation.

- **Timeline between the 2014 incident and the later well failures:** Not established from the sources reviewed — we have documented episodes, not a continuous timeline connecting them.
- **Population and farm-labor share:** Not captured in this pass; Stratford's status as a small, unincorporated Kings County farm town is well documented, but we don't yet have a sourced population or occupation breakdown.
- **Current status of the new well funding:** Confirmed as awarded; we don't have confirmation that it has resolved the underlying single-point-of-failure risk.

Part of a larger pattern

Stratford's story is less about a single contaminant than about infrastructure fragility — a town with no redundancy in its water system, where any well failure becomes a town-wide emergency. That distinguishes it from **Kettleman City's** legacy-contamination story and **Corcoran's** litigation against a named polluter, even though all three sit in the same county and the same farm economy.

Sources

- ABC30, "Black water in Stratford tap, Kings County" (2014). Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- KMPH, "Wells fail, people in Stratford told not to drink the water." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- ABC30, "Stratford residents likely to be out of water for rest of week." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- ABC30, "Stratford water still not drinkable, despite temporary fix." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- KMPH, "Stratford gets funding for new well, more drinking water delivered." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.

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