A $1-million-a-year bottled-water program, paid for by the polluters — Salida, Stanislaus County

Salida sits inside a regional nitrate crisis big enough that the state didn't try to fix it community by community — it ordered a coalition of farms, dairies, and cities to fund free bottled water for an estimated 50,000 households across Stanislaus and Merced counties at once.

50000

Homeowners across Stanislaus and Merced counties who could qualify for free bottled-water delivery under the regional nitrate program Salida sits inside.

$1M

Annual cost to the farms, dairies, businesses, and cities funding the program — formed under a 2020 Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board coalition.

What happened

Salida, in Stanislaus County, sits within a broader nitrate-contamination zone attributed to decades of farming — dairies and septic systems in particular — affecting private wells across Stanislaus and Merced counties. Rather than fund fixes well-by-well, the state coordinated a coalition of farms, dairies, businesses, and cities, formed in 2020 under the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, to fund a free bottled-water delivery program for qualifying households — an estimated 50,000 homeowners across the two-county area, at an expected cost to the coalition of about $1 million a year. The bottled-water program took effect May 7, 2021; residents sign up for well testing and free water through the Valley Water Collaborative. The sources reviewed don't give a timeline for actually cleaning up the underlying groundwater contamination — the program addresses exposure, not the contamination itself.

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

- **Groundwater cleanup timeline:** Not addressed in the sources reviewed — the bottled-water program is explicitly a stopgap, not a fix.
- **Salida-specific contamination data:** Not isolated from the broader two-county figures; we have the regional program's scale, not a Salida-specific nitrate level or household count.
- **Program's ongoing status:** Not reconfirmed past its 2021 launch.

Part of a larger pattern

Salida's story is a regional-scale version of the same nitrate pattern documented in **Monterey Park Tract's** well contamination elsewhere in Stanislaus County — the difference is scale and funding mechanism: here, the state made the agricultural industry itself pay for the interim fix, rather than relying on federal or state infrastructure grants the way **Keyes** and **Armona** did.

Sources

- CBS News (Sacramento), "Free bottled water coming to thousands of homes with contaminated water." 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**.