Bottled water since 2014, now the wells are drying up too — Tooleville, Tulare County

Tooleville is a tiny, two-road farmworker community on the edge of the Sierra Nevada foothills in eastern Tulare County. Its roughly 75 homes have relied on bottled water since 2014 because both of the town's wells are contaminated with hexavalent chromium — and now the wells themselves are running dry.

75

Farm-worker homes in Tooleville, relying on bottled water since 2014 due to hexavalent chromium contamination.

2

Wells serving Tooleville — one began drying up as groundwater levels fell, with state officials expecting the second to follow within months.

What happened

Tooleville's roughly 75 farmworker homes have depended on bottled water since 2014, after both of the community's wells were found contaminated with hexavalent chromium — a contaminant distinct from the nitrate and arsenic problems documented elsewhere in this record. The wells also run dry periodically. More recently, falling groundwater levels caused one well to begin drying up outright, with the State Water Resources Control Board expecting the second to fail within months — turning a contamination problem into a supply problem on top of it. California has moved to mandate consolidation of Tooleville's water system with the neighboring city of Exeter's, a state-ordered fix driven directly by the drought-era well failures; we could not confirm the consolidation's completion timeline or final cost in the sources reviewed.

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

- **Consolidation timeline and cost:** Not confirmed — we know the state mandated consolidation with Exeter, not when it was finished or what it cost.

- **Hexavalent chromium levels and health guidance given to residents:** Not detailed in the sources reviewed.
- **Population beyond "roughly 75 homes":** Not independently confirmed as a headcount.

Part of a larger pattern

Tooleville shows a water crisis compounding on itself: a contamination problem that forced bottled-water dependence for a decade, now layered with an outright supply failure as regional groundwater levels fall. It sits alongside **East Porterville** and **Allensworth** as the three Tulare County communities most central to this project's original Gate 2 finding — and the one where the underlying crisis is, by the most recent reporting we found, still actively unresolved rather than fixed.

Sources

- **The Guardian (via Self-Help Enterprises), "'It smells bad': the US farmworkers grappling with unsafe water at home"** (Jan. 23, 2024).
- **Water Education Foundation (Aquafornia), "How drought forced California to mandate drinking water consolidation for Tooleville."**

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