

1 in 30 wells in the West failed in recent years

By Emily Benson, High Country News

When their taps began spitting out air instead of water a few years ago, one family in Paso Robles was forced to snake a hose from a neighbor's property into their home for drinking water. They ate from paper plates instead of dishes, could no longer wash their laundry at home and watched their vegetable garden dry up. For households that rely on well water – a common situation across the rural West – the impacts can be severe when a well runs dry.

Stories like that one streamed out of California during the drought that officially ended earlier this year, but the extent of the problem – exactly how many wells were affected – was unclear. Now, new research suggests that one in 30 groundwater wells in the West, wells that supply farms in addition to homes, went dry between 2013 and 2015.

To arrive at that number, California-based researchers Debra Perrone and Scott Jasechko compiled location and depth records for wells constructed between 1950 and 2015 across Western states.

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