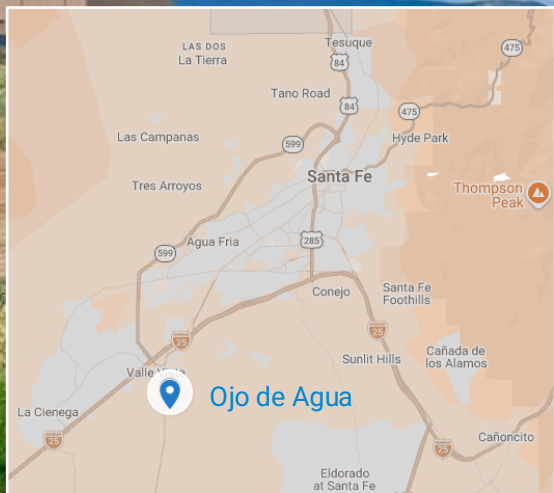


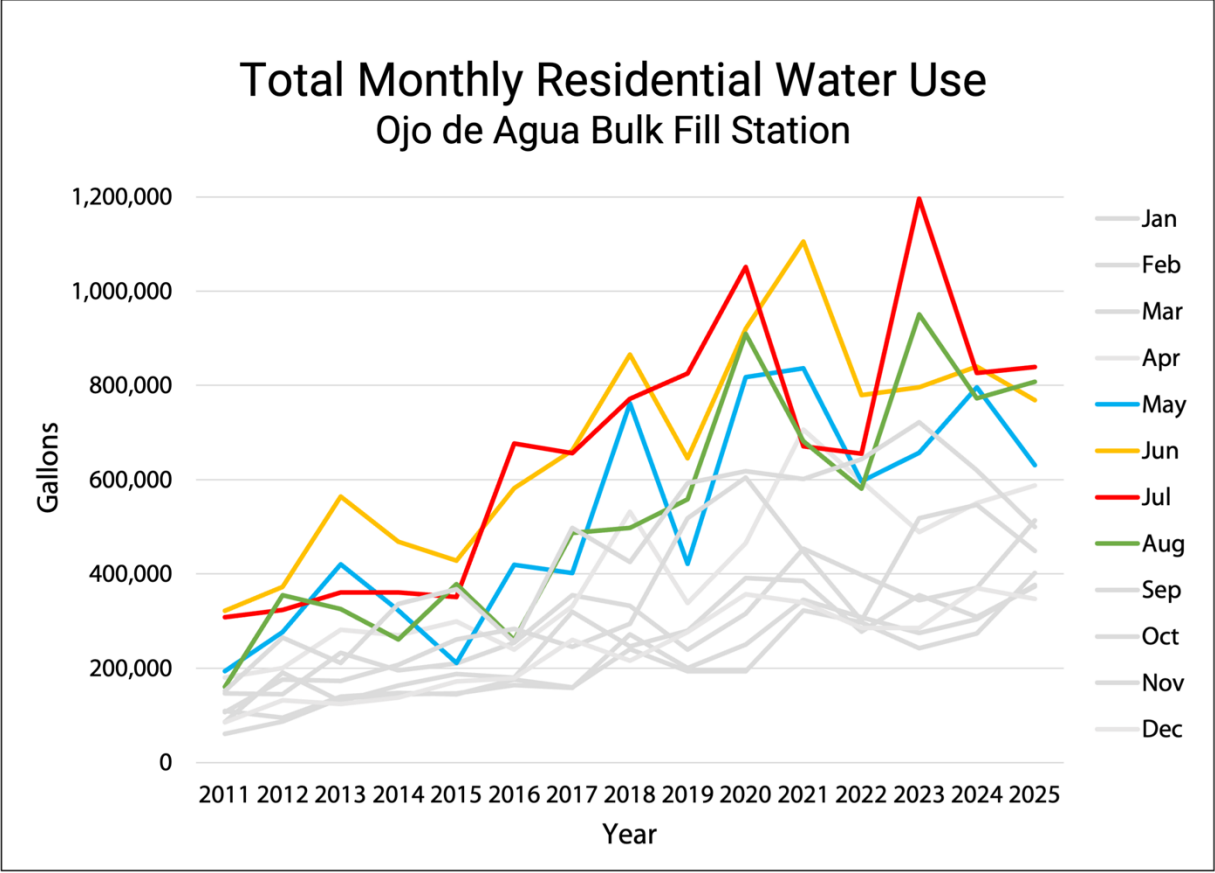
Water Hauling in Santa Fe County

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Data source: Santa Fe County Utilities Division

Water hauling is on the rise across the Southwest



Rio Verde Foothills, AZ ([2023](#))



Costilla County, CO ([2025](#))

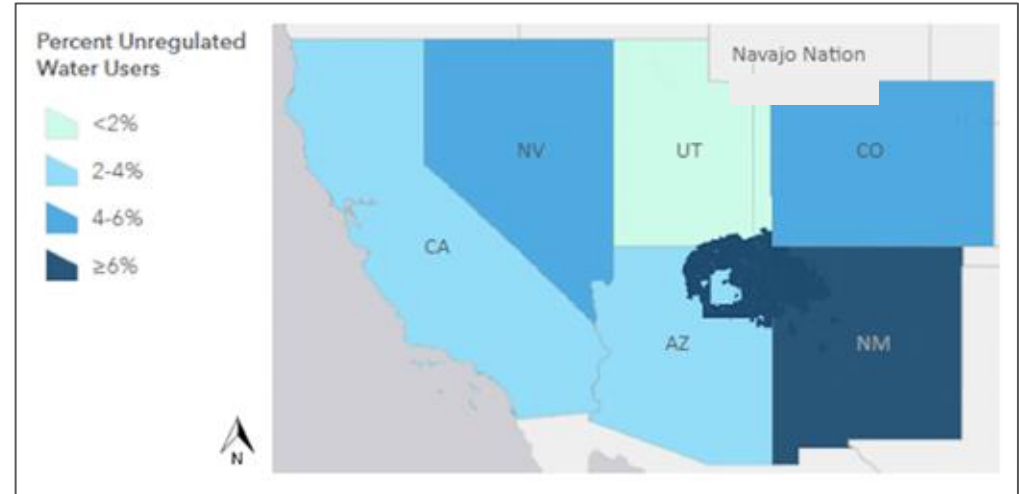


Mora, NM ([2026](#))

Major data gaps on self-supplied water users in the U.S. Southwest

Federally unregulated water sources:

- Domestic wells
- Hauled water
- Private springs
- Rainwater capture
- Small systems with <15 connections



Source: Dobbin et al. (2024)

14% of New Mexicans rely on self-supplied water ¹

¹ Dieter et al. (2018).

Water Hauling Types

Commercial

1. Formal (business license)
2. Informal

Residential

1. Individual haulers
2. Delivered water users
3. Hybrid water users



Photos by P.A. and D.R. (2025), used with permission

Research Approach

Summer 2025 fieldwork across Santa Fe County

- Semi-structured interviews ($n = 67$)
 - 34 households (40 respondents) that rely on hauled water
 - 9 Santa Fe county and city representatives
- Participant observation
- Analysis of county and city water data
- Examination of water reports, planning documents, and online community forums



Findings roadmap

1. Who relies on hauled water in Santa Fe County?
2. Motivations for hauling
3. Patterns of hauled water use
4. The costs of water hauling

“Water hauling here is like the Great Equalizer.”

(Interview #11, female, mid-fifties)

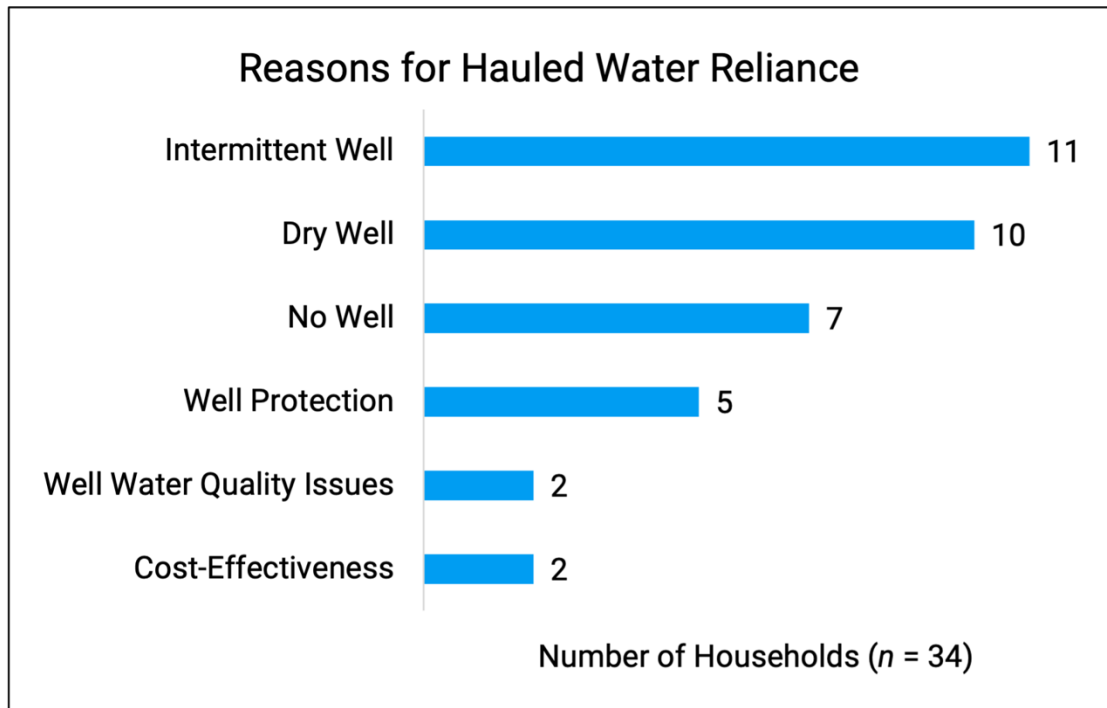
Who relies on hauled water in Santa Fe County?

Table 1. *Characteristics of water hauling participants in Santa Fe County (n = 40)*

Characteristic	Individual Haulers	Delivered Water Users	Hybrid Water Users	Santa Fe County
Age (years)	61 (19–75)	77 (67–82)	67 (55–82)	48
Household income (\$)	60,000 (24,000–300,000)	100,000 (75,000–200,000)	100,000 (70,000–250,000)	77,150
Hauling tenure (years)	5 (0.5–40)	10 (3–30)	12 (3–19)	--
Time in current home (years)	18 (1–47)	24 (4–30)	33 (14–36)	--

Each cell contains the median value and the range for each category in parentheses below.

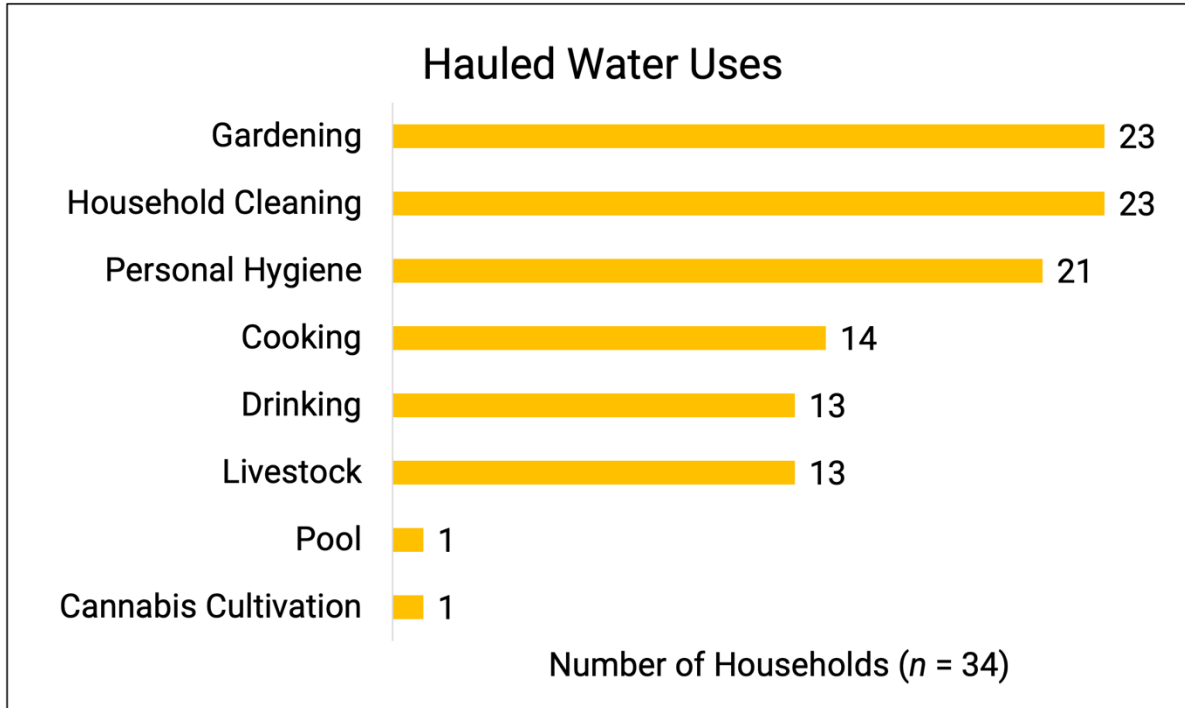
Motivations for water hauling



Thirty of the 34 households reported hauling water in response to experienced or anticipated domestic well-related issues.

Note: Values do not sum to 34 because respondents could report more than one reason.

Patterns of hauled water use



Only 13 households (38%)
drink hauled water.

Many additionally
purchase vended or
bottled water.

Note: Values do not sum to 34 because respondents could report more than one use.

Hauling as an accepted feature of rural life

“It’s a lifestyle for us, so we really can’t say it’s a burden. We’ve always hauled it for all the cattle and such, so it’s a lifestyle.”

(Interview #47, female, late sixties)

“What are you going to do? Sit there and wait for water to come? You gotta do it if you want to live out here and look at this [view] every day.”

(Interview #46, male, mid-thirties)

Hauling for those with limited options

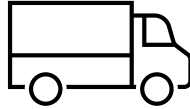
“I haul to families and a lot of elderly folks. So that's the part that keeps me from not just saying ‘I'm done.’ And of course, a lot of them are on a fixed income, so we haven't adjusted what we charge them for water forever.”

(Interview #42, male, early sixties)

The burdens of individual hauling



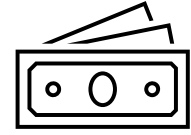
Water volume



Distance
traveled



Time



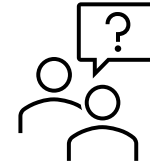
Financial
investment



Physical safety



Water quality
concerns



Individual
responsibility

The burdens of individual hauling



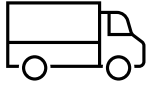
550
(250–1,600)
gallons of water
per trip

≈



2.3
(1–6.7)
tons of water
weight

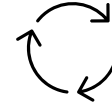
The burdens of individual hauling



20
(5–90)
miles round-trip



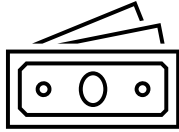
60
(15–210)
mins round-trip*



2
(0.25–10)
trips per week

*Does not include time required to prepare hauling rig, transfer water, clean the tank or cistern, or visit the County office to replenish one's Ojo account.

The burdens of individual hauling



\$100 – \$100k+
hauling expenses



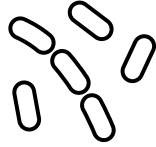
Photos by D.R. (2025), used with permission

Gasoline
Time
Hauled water
Water filters
Water pumps
Hoses
Water tanks
Trailers
Cisterns
Vehicles
Repairs

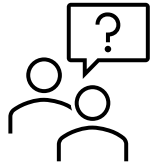
The burdens of individual hauling



Physical safety



Water quality
concerns



Individual
responsibility



Individual haulers at the Ojo de Agua
(photo used with permission)

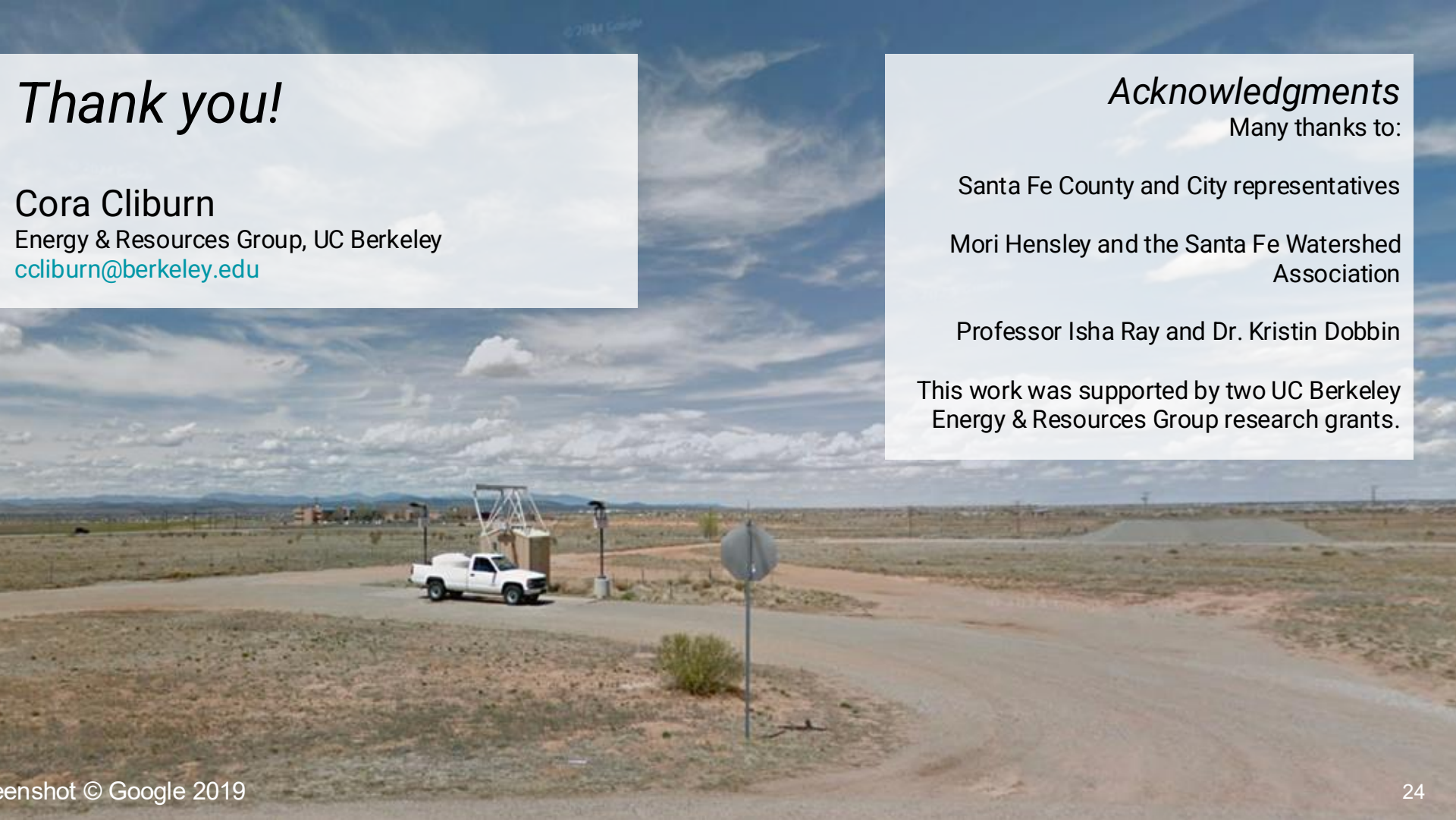


Algae growth in two commonly used
tank types among individual haulers

Research-identified opportunities to further support water haulers

- Online account management
- Expanded communication channels
 - Bilingual (Spanish–English) educational resources about safe water management practices
- Financial support for seniors and low-income residents for
 - Hauling equipment (water tanks, cisterns, trailers)
 - Gutter and rain barrel installation





Thank you!

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