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Features

Area towns expanding water systems

Low-interest loans initiated growth

By PAT DAVIDSON
Battalion Reporter

The convenience of city water began flowing to rural areas of Brazos County in 1966 when more than 100 families living in the Wellborn area south of College Station banded together to get a low-interest government loan to establish a water supply system.

Wellborn Water Supply Corporation's example was followed in 1967 by Brushy along Farm Road 60 west of College Station, and in 1969 by Wixon in the eastern quarter of the county.

Today the three supply systems provide water to more than 2,100 meters. Based on U.S. Census Bureau estimations of 3.5 persons per dwelling, this translates to more than half of the county's 11,926 residents living outside the

city limits of Bryan and College Station.

The water systems initiated rapid growth in the areas they serve, both by providing water where there had previously been none, and by providing a more convenient and economical supply than many of the private wells they replaced or supplemented.

But the flood of growth has carried with it some problems. For

The Farmers Home Administration provides loans to public bodies or nonprofit organizations unable to obtain funds from other sources at reasonable rates.

born system has jumped from the initial \$50 deposit to a minimum charge of \$600.

James Redman, a charter member of the Wellborn system, said residents of that community had difficulty getting water from their private wells, most of which were 300 to 500 feet deep. Sulfur, salt and other minerals affected the quality of the water and lent it an unpleasant taste and odor, he said.

A few of those who knew the difficulty of drilling and upkeep for private wells started meeting to learn how to obtain a 40-year loan at 5 percent interest from the Farmers Home Administration, Redman said.

More than 100 families were solicited to put up deposits. An engineer was consulted to determine the feasibility of the project, both in availability of water and ability of the system's members to repay the loan. The request was also reviewed to see that it was consistent with water development plans for the county.

The initial loan covered the cost of drilling wells and constructing pumps, storage and treatment facilities, distribution lines, and purchasing and installing a water

meter within the property boundary of each member.

Two of Wellborn's three original wells failed and were abandoned within six years, Redman said. Two-thirds of the system's water is purchased from Texas A&M University, with the third well providing the rest. In addition, Wellborn can buy water from the city of College Station.

The water system is owned and operated by the members who use it. A nine-member board of directors, of which Redman is president, governs the 702-member organization. The system serves 1,060 meters, which Redman said indicates multiple ownership of meters. However, each member has only one vote in the corporation, even if he owns more than one meter, he said.

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or nonprofit organizations unable to obtain funds from other sources at reasonable rates.

Charles Lyons, district FmHA representative serving Brazos County, said any money collected by the systems must go toward repayment of the loan or into a fund for operation and maintenance expenses. The money cannot be distributed among corporation members, he said.

The systems must adhere to Texas Department of Health requirements for water quality and quantity supplied to each meter. In addition, each system is required to have a licensed operator.

Whereas the Wellborn water system formed in response to bad water and faltering wells, Mrs. Morrison Moore, a lifetime resident of Brazos County who was instrumental in organizing the Wixon Water Supply Corp., said the water system serving her area was formed largely in response to land development in the area.

People living in the area or owning land decided a water corporation would be preferable to drilling individual wells, providing the low-interest loan could be obtained, she said. Most of the people living in the area had wells but wanted a backup system, she said. In addition, property owners who anticipated moving to the area put up deposits, since the water meter increased the value of the land, Moore said.

Anderson Jones, president of Brushy Water Supply Corporation, said the system was started "for the convenience of a lot of people who were not able to have running water." The system was organized in 1967 with just 35 members; today it includes 110 meters.

An additional FmHA loan was secured recently that will enable Brushy to expand its facility to accommodate approximately 500 new members, Jones said. Deposits were made on 292 of the new meters before the loan was granted, he said.

Another expansion of the

Brushy system is being done. It would extend service to Fairview, Smetana and other communities located north of Bryan.

Private artesian wells into an aquifer were the natural source of rural water wells were usually drilled 200 feet deep, at an estimated cost of \$7 per foot. The owner well was responsible for maintenance and sanitation with a mandatory government regulation.

Three local well drillers reported that they have had business as they can handle.

"The rural water supply agencies have not cut into the market," the wife of one of the said in a telephone interview.

Commercial water supply systems, such as Southern U.S. provide water to a small percentage of the county's rural areas.

The FmHA-assisted supply systems in Brazos County have been dynamic, but growth has led to some special policies.

The 40-year loans are far below current lending rates. In this sense, taxpayers are subsidizing the government-assisted loans. There is also a hidden cost in maintaining the government agencies that are a part of the community assistance programs. Farmers Home, the Brazos Development Council and Valley Community Agency.

Two of the county's systems charge an extra fee in addition to the FmHA loan. In this sense, taxpayers are subsidizing the government-assisted loans. There is also a hidden cost in maintaining the government agencies that are a part of the community assistance programs. Farmers Home, the Brazos Development Council and Valley Community Agency.

Wellborn charges a \$500 expansion fee in addition to the FmHA loan. The cost of the meter and

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ing the pipe to the minimum charge for the Wellborn system is the most expensive. The system received low interest assistance.

Corporation officials view such a fee as a "survival" fee.

Larry Brown, who is a year as business manager of the Wixon system, said "the you can tell that growth occur when a customer through the door."

Lyons said the fee is set forth by the Farmers Home Administration.

"But they (the members) want the system. We (FmHA) want the system. But them to provide water one," he said.

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