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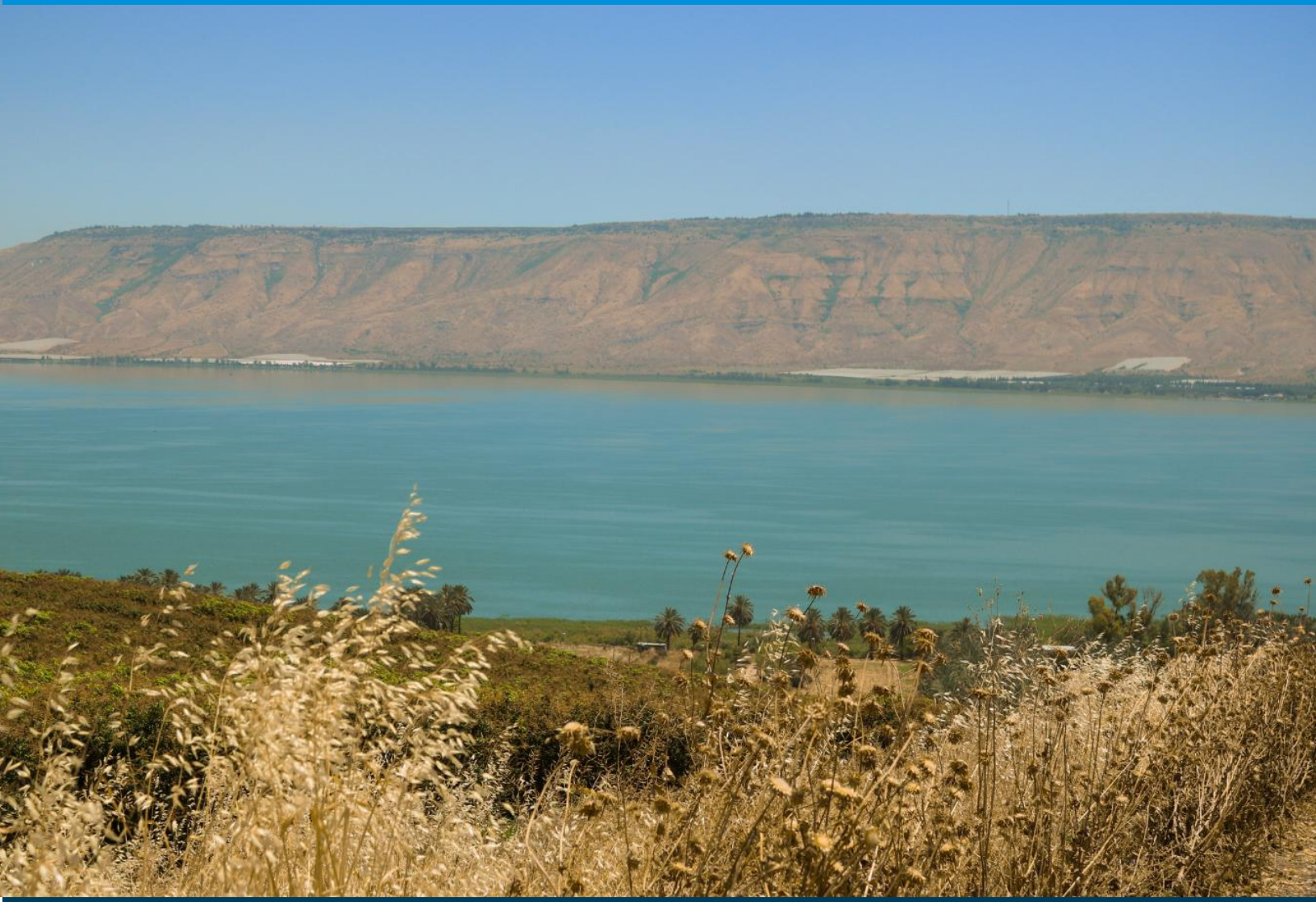


Final Survey Summary

Overview of well owner responses from all Focus Areas identified within the LUBGWMA region

Introduction

As part of the Morrow-Umatilla Counties' Drinking Water Roadmap project, a survey was developed to better understand the experiences, concerns, and priorities of private well owners living in areas affected by nitrate contamination. The goal of the survey was twofold: to gauge interest in drinking water solutions and to gain a clearer picture of how well owners currently interact with and think about their well water, particularly when it comes to testing, treatment, and perceived risks.

Previously, during Stage 2 of the project, surveys were delivered to Focus Areas (Figure 1) at the beginning of April 2025 within the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA) that are adjacent to cities being considered for potential water system connections and non-connection options. Following the initial round of distribution, additional printed surveys were mailed to addresses in remaining focus areas during mid-November, 2025 as part of Stage 3. By **February 10th, 2026,** a total of **151** survey responses had been received. This was a 64% increase in responses from Stage 2.

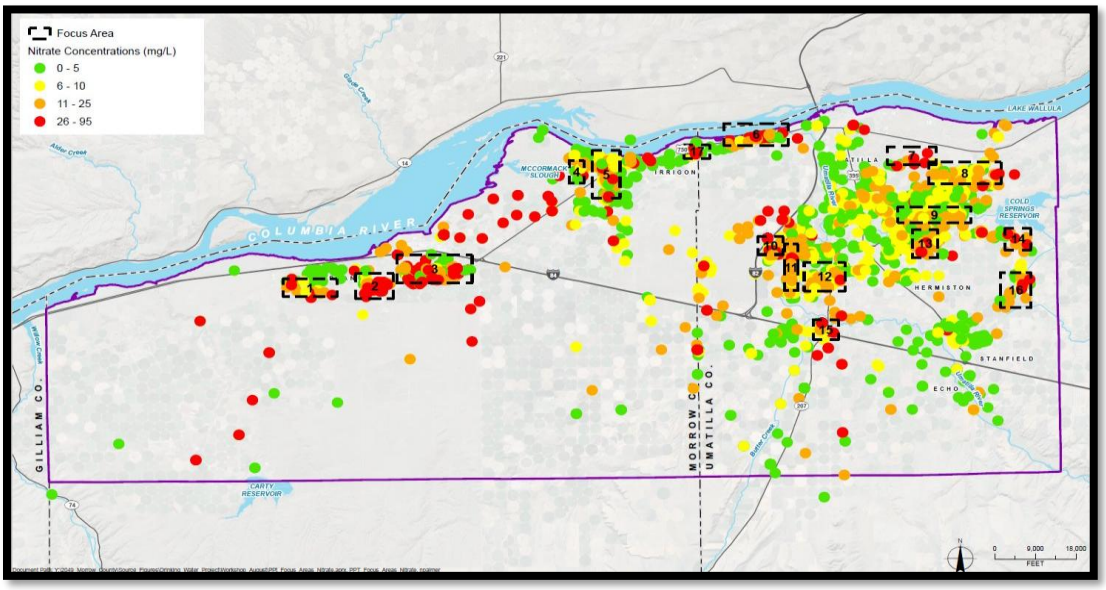


FIGURE 1 FOCUS AREAS IN LUBGWMA

The additional responses gathered from Stage 3 were combined with Stage 2 to provide a more complete picture from well owners' perspectives. The survey asked respondents about their knowledge of nitrate contamination, key factors influencing their decision to test, and their openness to potential solutions such as new or deeper wells, home treatment systems, or connections to municipal or shared water supplies.

The feedback collected through this effort provides insight on community readiness and preferences, helping shape practical, community-informed approaches to improve drinking water safety.

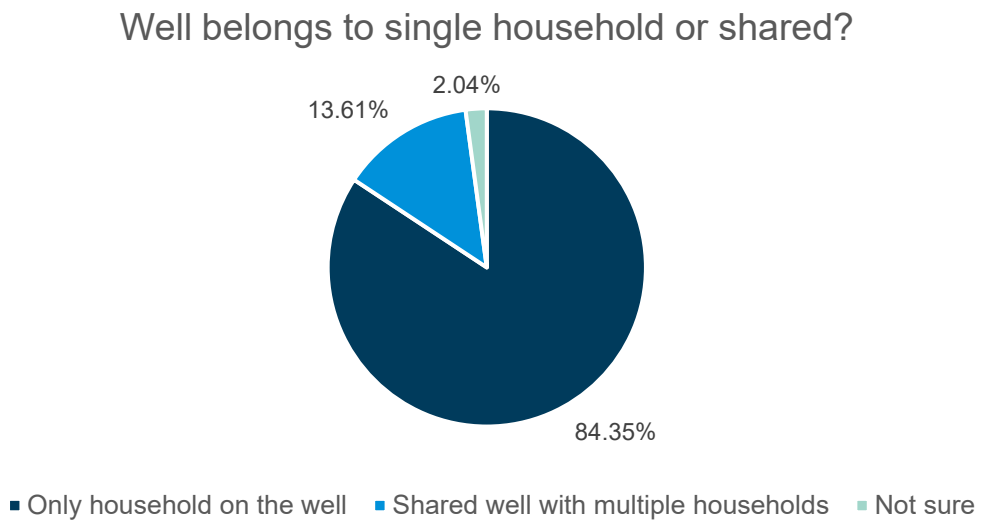
Below is a comprehensive overview and analysis of the feedback submitted by residents.

Respondent Profile

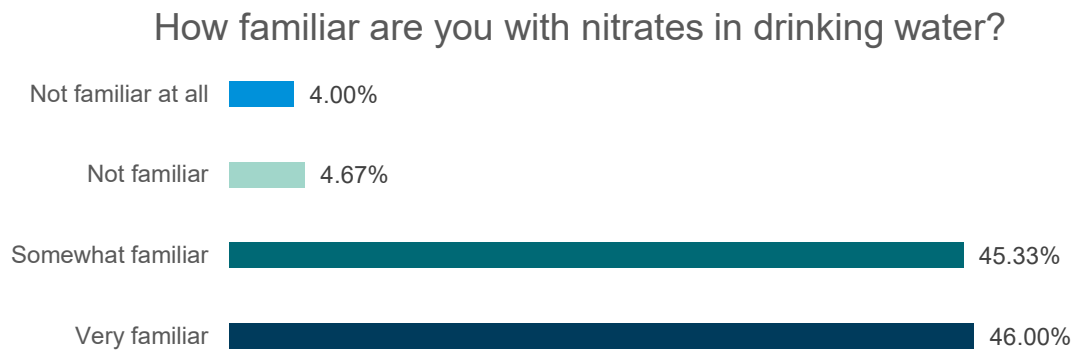
Rather than asking for home addresses, respondents were asked to identify which City they lived closest by to encourage participation and allow for privacy.

- **Respondents were nearly evenly split between Morrow and Umatilla Counties, with approximately 49% from Morrow County and 51% from Umatilla County.**
- **Respondents were from Hermiston, Irrigon, Boardman, Umatilla, and Stanfield**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their household was the only one using their well or if they had a shared well. 84% of wells belonged to a single household and around 14% were on shared wells.



To get a better sense of how well owners understand what nitrate in the LUBGWMA are, respondents were asked to indicate their level of familiarity with nitrate in drinking water. Their options were *Not familiar at all, Not familiar, Somewhat familiar,* and *Very familiar.* Overall, around 91% of respondents were familiar with nitrate in drinking water with 9% who were not.



In addition to familiarity with nitrate, respondents were asked where they currently get their information about water quality and nitrate contamination. This question can help understand trusted information sources by residents and help identify potential communication gaps and opportunities to strengthen outreach efforts. The *County Health Department* emerged as the most commonly cited source, selected by recondenses from Stage 2 and 3. *Online sources, including news, social media, and websites*—were the second most common (50%). *City or local government* is a source that was least utilized for water quality and nitrate information by 30% of respondents.

County health department 68.84%

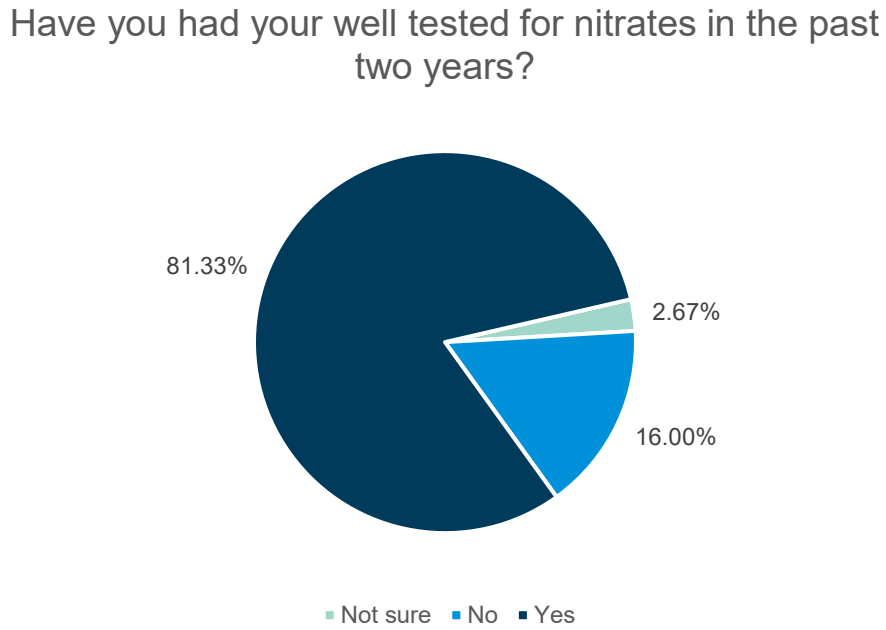
Online sources (news, social media, websites) 50%

State of Oregon 40.58%

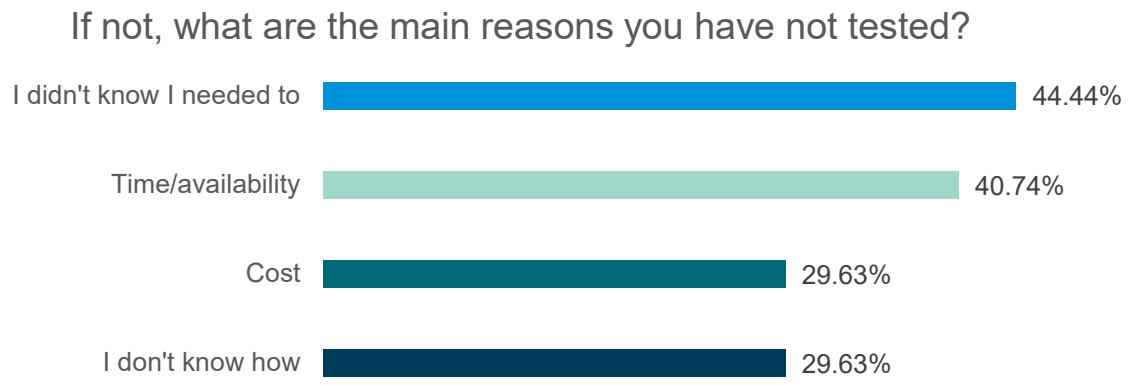
Friends, family, or neighbors 30.43%

City or local government 28.26%

Select private wells were sampled during Stage 2 and 3 to confirm conditions in areas with limited or older data, validating existing groundwater information. To further gauge well testing participation, respondents were asked if they had completed testing within the last 2 years. 81% of respondents had indicated their well had been tested, conversely, 16% had not.



Of the 16% percent of respondents who have not had their well sampled in the last 2 years, 44% *did not know that they needed to*. 41% did not have the *time/availability*. Less than 30% indicated *Cost* and *didn't know how* as a reason.

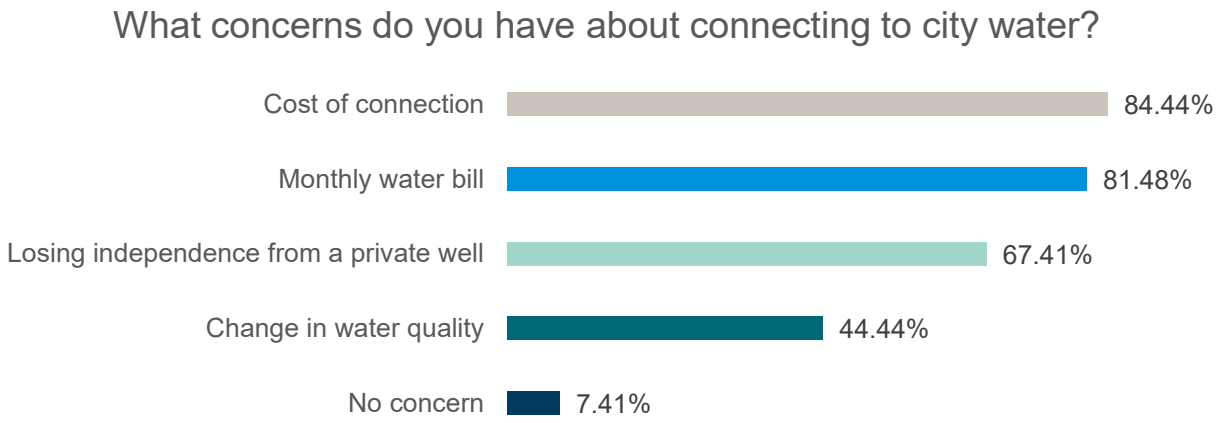


Respondent Highlights

Building on the respondent profile, this section summarizes key themes and takeaways from questions focused on water quality concerns and potential solutions. Respondents were asked to share their thoughts on options such as connecting to a city water system, drilling a new or deeper well, or installing a home treatment system. Their responses, both multiple choice and open ended, offer valuable insight into community preferences, hesitations, and priorities when it comes to addressing nitrate contamination in private wells.

Concerns

Respondents were asked to indicate all the concerns they had about connecting to City water. More than 80% of respondents cited *Cost of connection* and *Monthly water bill* as their top concerns. These were followed by *Losing independence from a private well* (67%) and *Change in water quality* (44%).



Many of the open-ended responses continued to reflect skepticism about the feasibility and availability of connecting to city water. Respondents frequently noted that they live outside city limits or are located too far from existing infrastructure, making connection logistically challenging.

"We live 1 ¼ miles outside Umatilla."

"City water is not available where I live."

"I live many miles from City water service – too far from connections."

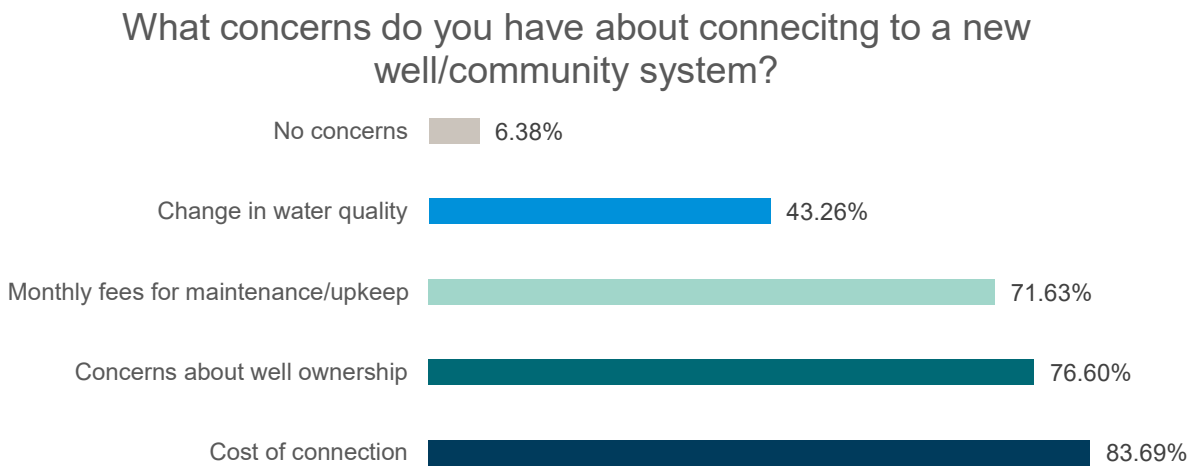
Some respondents also expressed a strong desire to remain independent from city services, citing previous investments in their wells.

"Too much government control – I don't want to have anything to do with the city."

"We spent over $30,000 to put our well in – don't want it to be a total wash."

"I have water rights to my well. Why would I give that up?"

Respondents were asked if they had concerns about connecting to a new, deeper well or community water system. This includes a shared well serving multiple households. *Cost of connection* (84%) and *Concerns about well ownership* (77%) were of most concern to well owners about this option. *Monthly fees for maintenance/upkeep (73%)* followed.



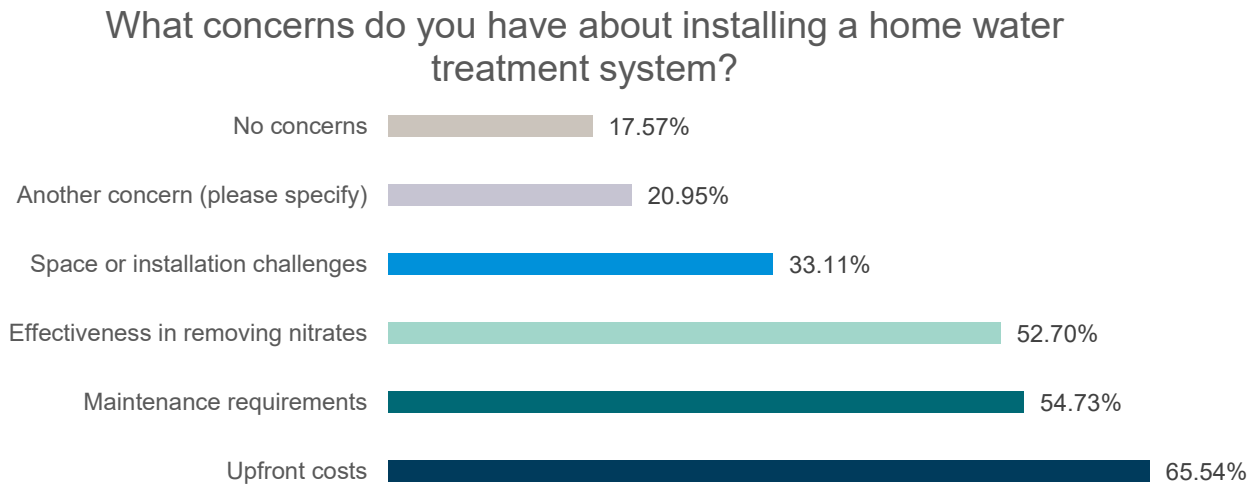
34 individuals provided comment to this question, with a small handful expressing discomfort with the idea of shared wells or community systems. Many of the concerns reflect gaps in understanding the implementation process of this potential option.

"I have seen lots of people problems with shared wells."

"Constant feuds between users."

"Who would write up the agreement, and would it be a legal document to keep everybody on an agreement?"

Respondents were asked what concerns they had about installing a home water treatment system. *Upfront cost* (66%) was the most cited concern. *Maintenance requirements* and *Effectiveness in removing nitrate* received more than 50% of responses. These were followed by *Space or installation challenges* (33%). Around 21% indicated having *no concerns*, however, 18% indicated having another concern – highlighting their concerns regarding effectiveness of home treatment systems addressing nitrate.



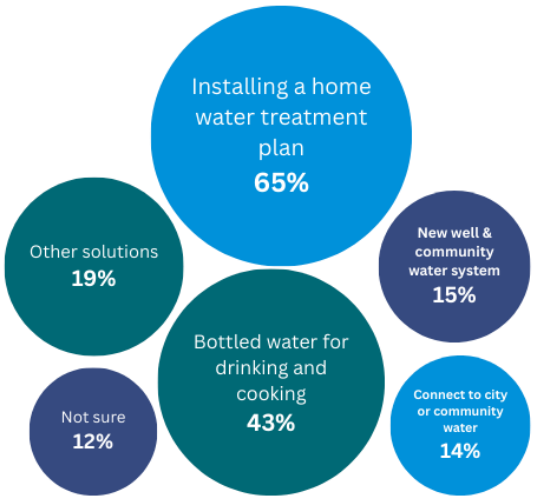
"We've had 3 different companies come out and tell us the nitrates are too high for their systems to make much of a difference"

"This is our preferred method for having good water. We have had an RO filter for years, but don't think our current system does the job required."

"We have a system under the kitchen sink but that does not fix the problem in the whole house. Need system at the pump house to filter water before it comes into the house."

Solutions

Respondents were asked how they would prefer to address nitrate contamination if they had high elevated levels in their drinking water. The graphic below shows the potential options most favored by participants.



For the 19% (27) respondents who chose *Other* – most cited having current water delivered or a preferred a new and deeper well in response to elevated nitrate.

"Personal deeper well."

"New well."

"Already having bottled water for drinking and cooking."

When asked what would help them decide how to address nitrate contamination, the majority of respondents (79%) indicated *Understanding cost and financial assistance options* as the primary choice. *One-on-one technical advice* (53%) and *More information about nitrate health risks* (39%) followed. *Community meetings or workshops* was the lowest rated option at 19%. Among open-ended responses to this question, many expressed self-sufficiency and understanding the issue where it stands.

"Already had enough contacts and told about it enough!"

"I understand it perfectly!"

"None, doesn't bother me."

Additional Community Perspectives

Survey participants were invited to share any further thoughts on drinking water solutions in the region. Their open-ended responses provide deeper insight into community concerns and proposed actions. While some reiterated their frustrations, others offered personal experiences or called for systemic change. There was a total of 66 responses to this question, with 3 of the original main themes further solidified by responses. An additional theme emerged based on developing information and external factors.

Calls for Financial and Infrastructure Support

Residents continued to frequently emphasize the need for affordable solutions, such as new wells, filtration systems, or public water infrastructure, insisting this should be funded externally. Several respondents cited the high cost of well installation or treatment systems and noted reliance on bottled water as an interim measure.

"Who's going to pay for a whole house water treatment system?"

"Our neighbors drilled a new well until they got their water within the acceptable nitrate levels. If there's financial assistance, we'd like to do the same."

"We would love soft, sweet-tasting water… but can it be done at a cost we can afford."

Frustration, Urgency, and Health Concerns

Many responses reflect ongoing frustration, heightened urgency, and serious health concerns related to long-term nitrate exposure. Respondents described increasing nitrate levels over time, uncertainty

about the effectiveness of existing treatment systems, and fears about bathing and drinking contaminated water. Several also shared deeply personal health experiences.

"My nitrates have gone from 50.9 to 55.6..."

"Nitrates are a huge and urgent issue that needs to be addressed in a timely manner."

"We have been dealing with this issue for 33 years… we are not sure our current system is cleaning our water properly."

Frustration Around Accountability and Responsibility

An increased response among participants expressed frustration and concern over who is responsible for nitrate contamination and who should bear the cost of solutions. There were differing perspectives on the causes on the issue, but a common sentiment was that the burden should not fall solely on individual well owners.

"I do not feel we should have to pay for any installation or anything…"

"Hold organizations contaminating water accountable."

"More focus on the problem, less on unlikely solutions"

Differing Perspectives on Long-term Solutions

Responses also revealed differing views on appropriate long-term solutions. Some residents supported centralized or municipal water systems as the most effective approach, while others expressed strong preferences for maintaining independence and self-sufficiency associated with private wells. Concerns were raised about shared or community systems related to cost distribution, management, and future water quality. Several respondents suggested that offering a range of solution options would better reflect the diverse needs and values of residents in the region.

"Offering a variety of fixes is the best approach"

"Stop the pollution of groundwater"

"Part of country/rural/farm living that appeals to lots of us out here is the disconnect we enjoy from community/municipal systems and the ideal of becoming as self sufficient as possible"

Summary Highlights

- **High familiarity with nitrate contamination.** A large majority (91%) of respondents reported being familiar with nitrate in drinking water, showing strong community awareness of the issue, including source contamination.

- **Health Departments remain most trusted sources for information.** The County Health Department was cited by 69% of respondents as their main information source, followed by online sources, the State of Oregon, family and friends, and local government.

- **Most wells are privately owned and recently tested.** 84% of respondents use a private, single household well, and 81% have tested their wells in the past two years. Among those who hadn't, not knowing how to get tested and time constraints were the main reasons.

- **Cost is the leading concern across all water solutions.** Whether it's city water, deeper wells, or home treatment systems, upfront and ongoing costs are the top concerns preventing actions. 79% said that understanding the cost of available financial assistance would most influence their decision-making.

- **Desire for Independence from City systems.** A growing consensus among residents is skepticism of connecting to City water due to costs, distance, and a strong preference for maintaining their private wells and autonomy.

- **Mixed views on home treatment systems.** Although seen as a possible solution, many questioned the long-term effectiveness of point-of-use systems and saw them as a temporary fix rather than full solutions.

- **Maintenance for water solutions emerged as a new concern.** Many well owners expressed further understanding of what maintenance might look like for their households as new solutions are proposed.

- **Community meetings ranked low for engagement.** Only 19% said community meetings or workshops would help them make decisions, indicating a preference for direct support like one-on-one advice or clear written information.

- **Residents want accountability, not just solutions.** Open-ended feedback reflected frustration over responsibility and blame, with many feeling that pollution should be addressed.

- **Shared systems raise social and ownership concerns.** While some were open to community solutions, others expressed mistrust or discomfort with shared wells, citing interpersonal conflicts and property rights.