



# A Restaurant Owner's Guide to Taking Back the Tap



**food&waterwatch**



## **Now Is the Time for Restaurants to Join Consumers as We Take Back the Tap**

Dear Restaurateur,

In the interest of protecting our water resources, Food & Water Watch invites all restaurant owners to join consumers in a national effort to kick the bottled water habit and take back the tap.

U.S. citizens are wasting billions of dollars a year on billions of gallons of bottled water, at least in part because they think it is healthier or safer than its counterpart from the tap. It is not. In fact, many bottling companies get their water straight from public water supplies, and then sell it at a price many times higher than tap water. Meanwhile, the production, transportation and consumption of the plastic bottles burns fossil fuels, generates mountains of waste and taxes our already overburdened public water systems.

In 2008, the city of San Francisco partnered with Food & Water Watch on the Take Back the Tap campaign that urges restaurants to hold the bottled water and, instead, serve only tap water. Now, restaurants across the country are joining the movement by pledging to eliminate bottled water from their menus.

This guide will explain why consumers across the country are kicking the bottled water habit and how you, as a restaurant owner, can get involved.

Thank you for your interest, and we hope that you will join us in our efforts to provide clean, affordable water for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Hauter", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wenonah Hauter  
Executive Director  
Food & Water Watch

# Take Back the Tap Pledge

As a chef, general manager and/or restaurant owner, I pledge that our business will:

- Eliminate the sale of non-carbonated bottled water;
- Serve municipal tap water;
- When asked, explain to customers and staff the benefits of tap over bottled water.

**BUSINESS** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT** \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE** \_\_\_\_\_ **FAX** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL** \_\_\_\_\_

**STREET** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY/STATE/ZIP** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fax to: 202-683-2484 (DC) or 415-293-9912 (CA).**

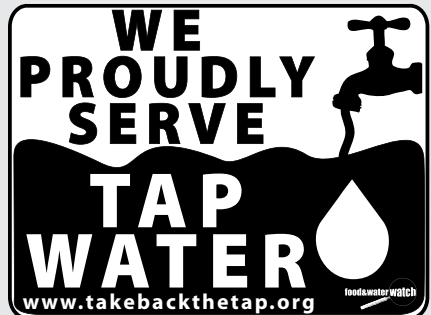
**For more info, contact Food & Water Watch: 202-683-2500 (DC),**

**415-293-9900 (CA) or [water@fwwatch.org](mailto:water@fwwatch.org) (DC),**

**[california@fwwatch.org](mailto:california@fwwatch.org) (CA)**

**[www.takebackthetap.org](http://www.takebackthetap.org) • [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)**

Participating restaurants will be added to our nationwide directory of non-carbonated bottled water-free restaurants on [www.takebackthetap.org](http://www.takebackthetap.org), and receive a certificate of participation and a Take Back the Tap window sticker.







## **Why consumers across the country are breaking the bottled water habit**

In 2007, U.S. consumers wasted \$12 billion on nearly 9 billion gallons of bottled water, in large part because advertising spin has led them to believe that water in a bottle is safer or better than tap water. It is not.

### **Bottled water is not safer than tap water**

Tap water in the United States is just as safe as bottled water, and in many cases more so. The federal government requires far more rigorous and frequent safety testing and monitoring of municipal drinking water than bottled water. The Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates tap water, requires that utility companies test municipal water hundreds of times per month, while the Food & Drug Administration, which regulates bottled water, requires only one water test per week by bottling companies.

Meanwhile, independent testing has found arsenic, microbes, toxic chemicals and other pollutants in various brands of bottled water. A 2008 report suggests that bottled water is no safer or purer than tap water. Environmental Working Group's laboratory tests of 10 popular U.S. bottled water brands found mixtures of 38 different pollutants, including bacteria, fertilizer, Tylenol and industrial chemicals. Many researchers believe that phthalates, which are chemicals used to soften plastic, can leach from plastic bottles into the water they contain. Phthalates and other substances used to make plastic have been linked to birth defects, cancer and developmental problems in humans.

## Boulder, CO: Turley's

Turley's has provided casual, healthy food to residents of Boulder, Colorado, for more than 30 years. Serving tap water was a no-brainer for this restaurant that sells hormone- and antibiotic-free meats, cage-free eggs and organic produce.

*"In this day with all the information we have on bottled water, it makes no sense to buy bottled water. The cost factor is obvious. Plus the fact that you're not polluting the planet with additional plastic. It's a no-brainer. We have a filtration system here and it's something that I think the customer appreciates."*

*– Paul Turley, owner  
Turley's*

## Bottled water is far more expensive than tap water

Although bottled water is not superior to tap water, it is far more expensive. On a per-gallon basis, tap water costs about \$0.002, while bottled water costs \$0.89 to \$8.26.

Since as much as 40 percent of bottled water comes straight from the same water supplies as water from the tap, this amounts to paying up to 4,000 times more for the exact same product.

## Bottled water causes social and environmental problems that tap water does not

Bottled water causes many equity and environmental problems. Already, public water systems in the United States are facing challenges providing affordable water for their citizens.

When beverage companies take water from municipal or underground sources and charge exorbitant prices for it, they are making profits off of water that local people need.

Meanwhile, the production and transportation of plastics takes a significant toll on the environment. U.S. plastic bottle production requires more than 17 million barrels of oil, enough to fuel 100,000 cars.

## Ithaca, NY: Moosewood

Moosewood Restaurant opened its doors in 1973 at a time when natural foods and cuisine was in its infancy in the United States. They have been instrumental in bringing natural foods with a vegetarian emphasis into the mainstream. Moosewood has been a strong supporter of local farmers and local products since its inception.

*“We have always served Ithaca tap water, investing in a filtration system six years ago and doing away with bottled water. In our continuing efforts to minimize our ecological footprint, we now serve filtered carbonated water as an alternative to bottled sparkling water. We even remind customers on our menu that tap water is more eco-friendly.”*

*— Laura Branca,  
co-owner Moosewood*

The industrial processes emit toxic chemicals, while the transport adds more pollution and carbon emissions that contribute to global climate change. In the end, the 86 percent of the empty plastic bottles in the United States that are not recycled end up as mountains of plastic trash that will be sitting in landfills for years to come.

## Taking Back the Tap in restaurants across the nation

Many restaurant owners across the country have decided that selling bottled water just isn't worth the extra profit.

Larry Mindel, whose restaurant Poggio in Sausalito, California serves only filtered tap water, shared his thoughts with the Associated Press:

*“Even though he could charge diners double or triple what he pays for water, he said it gives him a ‘stab’ to pay so much — or charge others — for something that falls from the sky.”*

And according to Mike Kossarienzi, general manager of Chez Panisse in California, in the same news article: “We just decided this was something we had to do. It just makes sense to us to not have to use all the energy and resources to bottle water in Italy and then truck

## San Francisco, CA: Incanto

Incanto is an Italian restaurant in San Francisco's Noe Valley neighborhood. Since it opened in June of 2002, Incanto has exclusively served San Francisco tap water: filtered, chilled, and served either still or sparkling in reusable one-liter carafes. Incanto made the decision to serve San Francisco water instead of imported bottled waters because it eliminates an awkward moment for guests and because serving local water goes hand-in-hand with serving locally grown food.

*“Offering our guests complimentary filtered San Francisco water with their meal combines the best of generous hospitality, care for our surroundings, and authentic local flavor. What we sacrifice in profits by not selling bottled water, we more than make up in increased goodwill with our guests.”*

*—Mark Pastore,  
owner Incanto*

it to our restaurant and then after that deal with the recycling of it.”

Laura Branca, co-owner of the renowned Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, New York, believes restaurants can be models for sustainable practices. “Moosewood continues to advocate for ecological awareness. We consistently try to acknowledge and minimize negative environmental impacts when making business decisions. We believe the hospitality industry can lead the way toward sustainable business practice.”

Restaurants in New York, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Ann Arbor, Madison, Boulder, Ithaca, Northampton, Memphis, Omaha, and Durango are pledging not to serve bottled water as well.



## New York City, NY: Il Buco

Il Buco is an Italian Mediterranean restaurant located in Manhattan's NOHO District. Il Buco has been serving tap water over bottled water for the past 10 years.

*“We made the decision to serve tap water because we wanted to serve the purest water possible. The process of eliminating bottled water from the menu was easy. It is hard to trust what you are getting in bottled water, and we felt like filtering our own was the best way to provide our customers with the purest water possible. Making the decision to serve solely tap water has also significantly diminished the amount of waste generated by our business.”*

– Ondine Appel, Event Manager at Il Buco

## Serving filtered tap water?

Many restaurants prefer to filter the tap water to improve its taste or to allay the fears of customers who may worry about tap water safety. This may not be necessary in all locations. Restaurant owners can educate themselves and their customers about their local water sources and quality by obtaining the Annual Water Quality Report from their local utility. This report details local tap water sources and testing results.

Depending on the specific concerns regarding the tap water, commercial-grade water filters are available that use many different technologies, including calcite/carbon blends, Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) hexametaphosphate crystals, KDF media, UV light and reverse osmosis. These technologies use different techniques to remove particles or kill germs, and some are more effective for certain filtering needs than others. Whatever technology the filter uses, the most important information for you to know is whether the particular product you are using is appropriate to filter the substances you want to remove.

When looking for quality filters, it is important to make sure that the product has been tested by an independent certifying agency. National Sanitation Foundation

## Portland, OR: Higgins Restaurant & Bar

A favorite of business diners as well as gourmards, the upscale downtown Portland bistro delivers elegantly simple Northwestern fare that is made from fresh and local ingredients whenever possible.

*“Our focus here at Higgins is to choose the freshest local, seasonal and sustainable products as the basis for our cuisine. By doing so we maximize the benefit to our bodies, our communities and our environment. When it comes to choosing our drinking water the only sensible choice is obvious—good old Bull Run from the tap.”*

— Greg Higgins,  
Higgins Restaurant &  
Bar

International (NSF), Water Quality Association, and Underwriters Laboratories Inc. are three well-regarded organizations that test and verify water treatment and filtration product claims.

Other factors to consider when purchasing a filter include the capacity of the filter, water efficiency (reverse osmosis filters are less water efficient than carbon filters), and hidden costs, such as installation, maintenance, and replacement filter fees. In addition, many filters are sold specifically for use with restaurant equipment such as icemakers, coffee makers and soda machines.

Some research may be necessary to determine what water filter best suits your restaurant’s needs. You can always contact a local water filtration and purification installation company for advice and price estimates. Just make sure to verify licensing and certifications of water distribution operators, and be aware that the equipment may require extra maintenance and installation costs.

# Common Questions and Answers About Tap Water

*Q: Where does my tap water come from?*

A: You can easily find the source/s of your municipality's tap water by reading your water quality report, also known as a Consumer Confidence Report. This report, released every year, describes the source of your tap water. It is distributed to municipal water users in the mail, and can also be found on your water department's website.

*Q: How do I know whether the tap water is safe?*

A: Tap water is tested thousands of times each year to ensure it meets (or exceeds) all federal standards. The Environmental Protection Agency requires that all utilities provide an Annual Water Quality Report listing the test results for all federally regulated contaminants. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, each year over 90 percent of all water systems meet or exceed standards for tap water quality.

*Q: Can a filter remove chlorine and fluoride?*

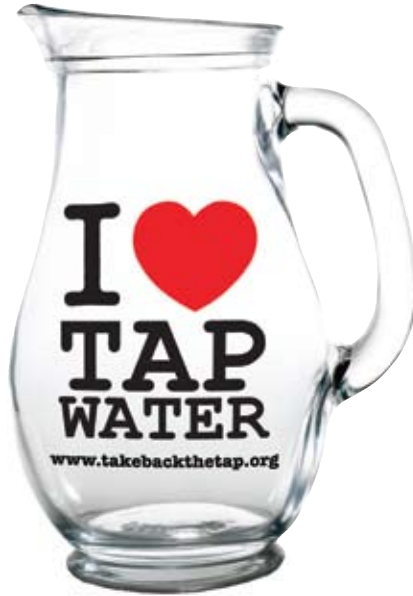
A: When it comes to chlorine, the answer is yes. Most water filters remove or reduce this chemical disinfectant. (Chlorine will also dissipate out of water when it is exposed to air.) On the other hand, fluoride is more of a challenge. Typically, only reverse osmosis filters and distillation units reduce or remove it.

*Q: Tap water tastes funny. What can you do about that?*

A: An odd flavor does not necessarily mean water is unhealthy or contaminated. The taste could be due to older plumbing, chlorination or the mineral content in the water. If you suspect it may be chlorine, a common complaint, try leaving an uncovered pitcher of the water in the refrigerator overnight. This will reduce the chlorine taste. For all other concerns, a filtration system is the best solution to this problem.

## Resources

For more detailed and in-depth information about the issues with bottled water and the benefits of tap water, read our report *Take Back the Tap: Why Choosing Tap Water Over Bottled Water is Better for Your Health, Your Pocketbook, and the Environment*, available at [www.takebackthetap.org](http://www.takebackthetap.org).



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