

Campus Campaigns to Ban Bottled Water

Fact Sheet • October 2016

College students are often champions of activism, and today many are successfully fighting the bottled water industry. The production, consumption and distribution of bottled water contribute to a host of social, environmental and economic problems.¹ Fortunately, students are a driving force in the movement to ban bottled water and stop the commodification of public water. To date, 73 campuses nationwide have enacted bottled water bans, and students have led efforts at over 100 schools to organize their communities and change how their campuses consume water.²

Why Ban Bottled Water on Your Campus?

The belief that bottled water is better than tap water is driven by a multimillion-dollar industry marketing effort.³ However, bottled water is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, whereas tap water is regulated more strictly by the Environmental Protection Agency.⁴

Bottling companies often take water from municipal or groundwater sources that local residents depend on for drinking, recreation and more. A Government Accountability Office report points out that large-scale bottled water extraction can reduce the availability of local groundwater, surface water and the resources that depend on them.⁵ When bottled water companies tap groundwater sources, they do not replenish what they pump out. This is in contrast to local irrigation and agricultural water users, who do return water to aquifers.⁶

Bottled water consumers are often drinking tap water that has been processed, packaged and shipped, damaging our environment and ultimately costing up to thousands of times the price of drinking this same water straight from the tap.⁷ In 2014, the United States consumed 10.9 billion gallons of bottled water, or 34 gallons per capita, and in 2015 that number went up to 36.7 gallons per person.⁸ One study found that the manufacture, production and transportation of bottled water is 1,100 to 2,000 times as energy intensive as the treatment and distribution of tap water.⁹ Furthermore, 71 percent of plastic water bottles are not recycled.¹⁰



Student-led Campaigns to Ban Bottled Water

In 2009, thanks to a student-led campaign, Washington University in St. Louis became the first known university to ban the sale of bottled water and to restrict the use of university funds to purchase it for campus events.¹¹ It started with a group of concerned students who formed a coalition to educate their peers about the benefits of tap water.¹² Their efforts led to a ban by the next year.¹³ Since then, more colleges have joined the fight to ban bottled water and promote the tap.

Success With Take Back the Tap. Student organizers have worked with Food & Water Watch's Take Back the Tap (TBTT) campaign to eliminate bottled water on campuses and encourage the use of refilling stations. For example, The New School and Emerson College both successfully eliminated bottled water, while the University of Chicago adopted a policy removing bottled water from department buildings and campus events.¹⁴

To reduce waste and support sustainability, the University of California at Fullerton and Princeton University installed refill stations.¹⁵ In 2014, the Student Union Assembly at the University of California Santa Cruz passed a resolution eliminating the sale of bottled water on campus.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Johns Hopkins University and the University of Tennessee led educational campaigns about the importance of choosing tap water.¹⁷ And Cornell University integrated TBTT into its Climate Action Plan. During orientation, all new students get briefed on the campaign and are provided with a reusable water bottle.¹⁸

Join the Movement!

Reach beyond the classroom and contribute to sustainable change by eliminating bottled water on campuses and supporting the right to equitable, safe and affordable public water. Visit foodandwaterwatch.org/campaign/take-back-tap to discover how you can Take Back the Tap!

Endnotes

- 1 See Food & Water Watch. [Report.] "Take Back the Tap: Bottled Water Wastes Resources and Money." June 2013.
- 2 Food & Water Watch research on campus bottled water bans, and Take Back the Tap records, list and sources on file.
- 3 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). "Bottled Water: FDA Safety and Consumer Protections Are Often Less Stringent Than Comparable EPA Protections for Tap Water." (GAO-09-610). June 2009 at 22; Whitman, Elizabeth. "The ad campaign that convinced Americans to pay for water." *Priceonomics*. June 10, 2016.
- 4 GAO (2009) at 6.
- 5 *Ibid.* at 26 to 27.
- 6 Boldt-Van Rooy, Tara. "'Bottling Up' Our Natural Resources: The Fight Over Bottled Water Extraction in the United States." *Journal of Land Use*, Vol. 18, Iss. 2. Spring 2003 at 279 and 280.
- 7 Food & Water Watch (2013) at 2; Whitman (2016); Gleick, P.H. and H.S. Cooley. "Energy implications of bottled water." *Environmental Research Letters*. Vol. 4. 2009 at 2.
- 8 Beverage Marketing Corporation. [Report.] "U.S. Bottled Water Through 2019." July 2015 at 3 and 5; Beverage Marketing Corporation. [Press release.] "Bottled water's impact on U.S. caloric intake 2000 - 2015." June 6, 2016.
- 9 Gleick and Cooley (2009) at 6.
- 10 Container Recycling Institute. "Bottled Up: Beverage Container Recycling Stagnates (2000-2010)." October 2013 at 26.
- 11 Daves, Jessica. "Washington University in St. Louis ends sales of bottled water." *Washington University in St. Louis Newsroom*. February 20, 2009.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Food & Water Watch research on campus bottled water bans, and Take Back the Tap records, list and sources on file; The University of Chicago. Office of Sustainability. "University encourages more sustainable drinking options." February 9, 2012.
- 15 California State University Fullerton News Service. "Expanding 'Take Back the Tap.'" May 11, 2015; Princeton University. Office of Sustainability, "Drink local." Available at <http://sustain.princeton.edu/lead/drinklocal>. Accessed June 28, 2016.
- 16 Student Union Assembly. University of California (UC) Santa Cruz. "Plastic Bottle Resolution." 2014; UC Santa Cruz Sustainability Office. "SUA passes resolution to end sale of bottled water at UCSC." November 7, 2014. Available at <http://ucscsustainability.blogspot.com/2014/11/take-back-tap.html>. Accessed August 5, 2016.
- 17 John Hopkins University. Office of Sustainability. "Water." Available at http://sustainability.jhu.edu/sustainability_initiatives/water/. Accessed June 28, 2016; University of Tennessee. Office of Sustainability. "Reuse month feature: Take Back the Tap and The Mug Project." Available at <http://environment.utk.edu/2015/02/09/reuse-month-feature-take-back-the-tap-and-the-mug-project/>. Accessed June 28, 2016.
- 18 Cornell University. Sustainable Campus. "Take Back the Tap." Available at <http://www.sustainablecampus.cornell.edu/initiatives/take-back-the-tap>. Accessed June 28, 2016.



For more information:

web: foodandwaterwatch.org

email: info@fwwatch.org

phone: (202) 683-2500 (DC) • (510) 922-0720 (CA)

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