



A Restaurant Owner's Take Back the Tap Guide to Serving Tap Water



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 March, 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 leading 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", written over a horizontal line.

Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
Food & Water Watch



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

Truth is, 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. 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.

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.

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.



Albuquerque: Frontier Restaurant

The Frontier Restaurant is one of Albuquerque's most beloved eateries. Founded in 1971 by Larry and Dorothy Rainosek, it has long been a central meeting place for families, visitors and students at the nearby University of New Mexico. On their menu you'll find hearty fiesta burgers, delicious breakfast burritos, amazing green chile stew and, of course, the famous Frontier sweet roll—but no bottled water. They proudly serve Albuquerque tap water—filtered, chilled and complimentary.

“We just want to provide a high-quality, affordable dining experience for our customers, so the big bottled brands don't really make sense here. They create a lot of waste. Plus, we have an excellent filtration system and our water tastes great. Our customers really appreciate it.”

– Dorothy Rainosek,
owner Frontier

Taking Back the Tap in restaurants across the nation

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

Larry Mindel, whose restaurant Poggio in 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 Pannis 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 it to our restaurant and then after that deal with the recycling of it.”

Restaurants in California aren't the only ones laying off the bottled water. Fine dining establishments in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Madison, Wisconsin; Boulder, Colorado; Memphis, Tennessee; Omaha, Nebraska; and Durango, Colorado are pledging not to serve bottled water, as well.

Boulder: 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*

Serving filtered tap water?

Even though tap water is safe to drink, 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.

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, softening resins 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

Memphis: Stella

Located in downtown Memphis, Stella serves fine wines and foods in a warm and elegant atmosphere. The menu at Stella can best be described as global contemporary with a Southern flair. The restaurant's outlook on bottled water, too, is global and contemporary.

“In the interest of being as environmentally conscious as is feasible, it’s an easy choice to no longer sell bottled water. It’s less expensive for the consumer and less environmentally damaging. Plus we have such good municipal water here in Memphis!”

*– Cindy Riley,
owner Stella*

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.

Madison: Lombardino's

Lombardino's, in Madison, has been a local tradition since 1954. Described by one local newspaper as “the best Italian restaurant in town, by a mile,” the friendly neighborhood eatery serves locally grown produce, eggs and meat. Now, they have pledged to use only local water—straight from the tap.

Ann Arbor: Zingerman's

Zingerman's, in Ann Arbor, offers a comfortable hang-out spot, events, tastings and a wide variety of foods and drinks. The deli serves thousands of made-to-order sandwiches, coffees, teas, fine farmhouse cheeses, pastries, scones, cakes, pies, gelato, and chocolate and, to accompany it all, tap water.

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

“We’ve found filtered tap water to be a completely adequate alternative to bottled still water, and not contributing more plastic bottles to our community’s land fills is a good thing.”

– Alex Young, Head Chef at Zingerman's



Common Questions and Answers About Tap Water in Omaha

Q: Where does Omaha tap water come from?

A: The city of Omaha gets its tap water from the Missouri and Platte Rivers, in addition to several wells that draw groundwater from the Dakota sandstone aquifer.

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

A: Omaha tap water regularly exceeds all federal and state drinking water standards. The Environmental Protection Agency requires that all utilities provide an Annual Water Quality Report, also known as a Consumer Confidence Report. A copy of Omaha's water quality report is available at <http://www.mudomaha.com/water/water.quality.report.html>. For specific water quality questions, call 402-504-7774. For more information about the quality of Omaha's water sources, you can also read a summary of the Source Water Assessment Report from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality at www.mudomaha.com.

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: Odd-tasting water does not necessarily mean that it 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.

Take Back the Tap Pledge

Key Facts:

- Most tap water is just as clean and safe as bottled water.
- The idea that all bottled water is pure is a marketing myth.
- Plastic bottles can leach chemicals into the water.
- About 86 percent of the empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled.

As a chef and/or restaurant owner, our business pledges to:

- Eliminate the sale of non-carbonated bottled water;
- Switch to serving municipal tap water instead of still bottled water;
- Help educate customers about the benefits of tap over bottled water;

BUSINESS _____

CONTACT _____

TITLE _____

PHONE _____ **FAX** _____

EMAIL _____

STREET _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

Fax to: 202-683-2484.

For more info, contact Annie Weinberg: 202-683-2483 or

aweinberg@fwwatch.org

www.takebackthetap.org



Food & Water Watch

1616 P St. NW, Suite 300 • Washington, DC 20036
p: (202) 683-2500 • e: foodandwater@fwwatch.org
www.foodandwaterwatch.org