

Campaign to Urge Restaurants to Use Tap Water Instead of Bottled

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University of Florida students will be going from restaurant to restaurant asking owners to stop offering bottled water to their customers. Gainesville will be the first city in Florida to tackle the campaign, said Jorge Aguilar, an organizer for Food and Water Watch. Read on for the article in the *Gainesville Sun* by Zachary Bennett. The original article appeared in the *Sun* July 5, 2008 and can be seen [HERE:](#)

Eateries urged to use tap water

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Food and Water Watch, a not-for-profit organization out of Washington, D.C., will kick off its "Take Back the Tap" campaign in Gainesville this weekend in hopes of getting more people to rely on tap water rather than bottled water.

University of Florida students will be going from restaurant to restaurant asking owners to stop offering bottled water to their customers. Gainesville will be the first city in Florida to tackle the campaign, said Jorge Aguilar, an organizer for Food and Water Watch.

"We believe more and more people are making their choices at the restaurants they eat at, so this is a good place to stop

them," Aguilar said. "We want to encourage restaurants to use a filtration system, because bottled water companies have undermined people's confidence in their local water."

Water Watch has seen most of its success in San Francisco by getting several upscale restaurants and San Francisco City Hall to eliminate bottled water from their premises.

But how does the organization move from San Francisco to Gainesville?

"Gainesville has been rated for years about being one of the greatest places to live and, they have very good drinking water," Aguilar said.

Gainesville was chosen to be a starting point in the campaign because of students at UF who are already active in trying to make society free of bottled water, Aguilar said.

"People should hold onto one plastic bottle and refill it so they don't have to throw away 10 in one week," said UF senior and Regional Water Watch coordinator Kelly Heber.

Some of the main restaurants that do not serve bottled water or that Water Watch is hoping to recruit this weekend are Buddha Belly, Burrito Brothers, Volta Coffee Tea and Chocolates, Steamerz, Book Lovers Cafe and Cafe Garden, said Heber.

Water Watch says it has a couple reasons for its gung-ho attempts to make bottled water obsolete: Bottled water is not cleaner or safer, it's more expensive than tap water and the amount of energy it takes to make plastics and transport them to businesses is expensive and harmful to the environment.

Tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency, which requires multiple testing of the water every day. Bottled water falls under the jurisdiction of the Food and Drug

Administration, which has fewer regulations, according to Water Watch.

The EPA, which regulates city water systems nationwide, typically conducts multiple water and filter checks every 15 minutes to 4 hours, according to www.epa.gov.

Only 1 percent of Gainesville Regional Utilities' water is used for drinking and every drop is treated for drinking, according to GRU engineer Rae Haffer. The cost of water when bought from GRU is \$1.56 for 1,000 gallons, said Haffer.

"Our water is tested on the hour to the highest standard for drinking and a lot of it is used for irrigation," Haffer said. "A lot of bottled water is taken from the tap, and it is sometimes 1,000 time more expensive than the tap."

Valerie Phillips, who owns the restaurant Caribbean Queen across from Santa Fe College's downtown campus, said she makes a lot of her money from selling bottles of water to people.

"It's a convenience to some people, especially the students that need to run back to class," Phillips said. "But I always offer tap water for free."

Since it opened, the downtown cafe Volta has been using a water filtration system so that it can serve filtered tap water to customers, said owner Anthony Rue.

Rue said he has been an active member of Global Underwater Explorers and understands the conditions of Florida aquifers and doesn't think he would ever serve bottled water at his business.

"Bottled water, there is no need," Rue said. "The quality of water that is in bottled water is no better or different than the water in Florida's aquifer, a few big bottled water

companies use Ginnie Springs as their source," Rue said.

For more information on the Take Back the Tap campaign, go to www.foodandwaterwatch.org or e-mail Heber at kellyheb@ufl.edu.