

U.S. has growing love affair with bottled water

By Tara Lohan, AlterNet

This spring, as California withered in its fourth year of drought and mandatory water restrictions were enacted for the first time in the state's history, a news story broke revealing that Nestlé Waters North America was tapping springs in the San Bernardino National Forest in Southern California using a permit that expired 27 years ago.

And when the company's CEO Tim Brown was asked on a radio program if Nestlé would stop bottling water in the Golden State, he replied, "Absolutely not. In fact, if I could increase it, I would." That's because bottled water is big business, even in a country where most people have clean, safe tap water readily and cheaply available. (Although it should be noted that Starbucks agreed to stop sourcing and manufacturing their Ethos brand water in California after being drought-shamed.)

In 2014 bottled water companies spent more than \$84 million on advertising to compete with each other and to convince consumers that bottled water is healthier than soda and safer than tap. And it seems to be paying off: Americans have an increasing love of bottled water, particularly those half-liter-sized single-use bottles that are ubiquitous at every check-out stand and in every vending machine. According to Beverage Marketing Corporation, a data and consulting firm, in the last 14 years consumption of bottled water in the U.S. has risen steadily, with the only exception being a quick dip during the 2008-09 recession.

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