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Offer Fresh, Pure Water the Green Way by Pete Van Cleave

From improving food quality to easing landfill waste, switching from bottled water to a water filtration system makes sense.

Carrying bottled water around has become a common American activity. From hotels and restaurants to movie theaters and county fairs, convenient and easy-to-carry purified water is now about as homegrown as apple pie. But along with its regular spot on beverage menus comes a price tag in three flavors: environmental, economic and epicurean.

The Problems

During the past five years, the proliferation of 16.9-ounce bottled brands has soared—an upswing that was largely initiated by U.S. soda manufacturers. Seeing the sales potential in the U.S. market, they followed the European trend of brands such as Evian and Volvic and introduced their own 16.9-ounce bottled brands. As the popularity of portable purified water increased, along with the demand, the price began to decrease. When first introduced, one 16.9-ounce bottle of water could cost \$1 or more wholesale, with a retail price 10 to 30 percent higher. Today, it's not uncommon for consumers to pay an approximate retail price of 21 cents per unit when buying a case of bottles.

However, convenience, affordability and quantity have created a perfect storm for landfills as they are choked by the rising numbers of plastic bottles, which do not

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break down easily. Water is the only beverage human beings must have to live, and many health experts recommend that adults drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day—approximately four 16.9-ounce bottles. If even a portion of American adults drink their entire recommended daily intake of water from bottles, where does all that plastic go? What is not recycled goes to landfills and contributes to the overload.

Restaurants, in particular, also incur the cost of storing bulky cases of bottled water in often limited and expensive rented space. Combined with pricey shipping and distribution factors, many restaurateurs are finding that their margin is negligible on bottled water products. In fact, having such products on the menu actually costs some restaurant owners more in handling and management than they are able to recoup in sales.

The Solution

Filtered water alleviates the challenges posed by bottled water products and has additional benefits. Taking the water already provided at a hotel or a restaurant site and transforming it to the level of purity consumers want—bottle quality—can be done with a high-quality yet cost-effective water filtration system.

Chefs have played a large role in the movement toward whole-house commercial filtration systems. They know how important quality is to a palate-pleasing meal, and water is an ingredient—in both the food they prepare and the beverages served. Filtered water makes for better-tasting coffee, tea and even mixed drinks.

Water filtration is more than a quality issue. It is not uncommon for restaurants to pay for their filtration systems in a fairly short period of time simply by reducing the syrup content in their soda by 10 percent. Without the need to mask the taste of unfiltered water, less syrup can be used (or less alcohol in a mixed drink). Almost all of the large U.S. fast food chains have been saving money for years by filtering water and using less syrup.

Soda manufacturers also know well that cleaner water

makes better soda. They have been filtering the water at their plants for years, and their recipe for soda in the can uses 10 percent less syrup than what they recommend for the post-mix sodas made by restaurants.

Food service operations receive significant cost and quality benefits from filtered drinking water and ice systems. The Everclean Rinse Reverse Osmosis and the Mach Valve or Hydrus Whole House Carbon Filtration Systems made by Kinetico, pay for themselves in lower ingredient and energy costs, and they take up less space than other systems.

Advertising that filtered water is served, or automatically serving it in reusable carafes, is the new “green” way to provide purified water without the bottles—and it keeps customers happy.

Pete Van Cleave has been certified by the Water Quality Association and is past president and regent of the Georgia Water Quality Association. He also owns Water for Life, a bottled water and water treatment firm located in suburban Atlanta, Ga. To learn more about filtered water for a restaurant or food service operation, contact Pete at Water for Life by visiting

<http://www.waterforlifeonline.com/> or calling 770/578-0600.

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