

January 28, 2008

Reader's Digest  
Via Email

Dear Editor,

The Reader's Digest article, "Bottled Water vs. Tap Water" (February 2008) provided a one-sided view of bottled water and was a disservice to your readers. Bottled water is a safe, healthy, convenient beverage that consumers choose to stay refreshed and hydrated. Any actions that discourage the use of this healthy beverage choice are not in the public interest. People recognize the importance of water consumption for hydration and refreshment and that should be encouraged. Many consumers likely drink both bottled water and tap water depending on the circumstances; it does not always amount to a tap water versus bottled water choice. Bottled water is growing in popularity because people appreciate its consistent quality, taste, and convenience and choose bottled water over the other beverages because it does not contain calories, caffeine, sugar, artificial flavors or colors, alcohol and other ingredients.

The bottled water industry is a leader in the food and beverage industry in reducing its environmental footprint, while at the same time delivering the healthful value of bottled water. Containers for bottled water, made from PET plastic, which are becoming increasingly lighter in weight, accounted for less than one-third of one percent of all waste produced in the United States in 2005. Any efforts to reduce the resources necessary to produce and distribute packaged goods—and increase recycling rates—must focus on ALL packaging and not just bottled water. Consumers can recycle, restaurants, businesses and governments can recycle and those are the actions that must be encouraged. The wrong path is to disparage a healthful beverage choice by falling into the trap of pitting bottled water against tap water or by focusing on the sliver of packaging used in bottled water products. Therefore, a singular focus on bottled water is not an effective approach; broad ranging, comprehensive solutions are.

The fact is that ALL bottled water is comprehensively regulated as a packaged food product by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which mandates stringent standards to help ensure bottled water's consistent safety, quality, and compliant labeling. By law, FDA bottled water standards must be at least as stringent and protective of public health as U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for municipal drinking water systems. Further, as with all food and beverage packaging, containers for bottled water must be approved by FDA for their prescribed use. This protocol requires that the packaging materials are demonstrated scientifically to be safe under a variety of conditions. To characterize this fact as anything to the contrary is a disservice and just plain wrong.

Regards,

Stephen R. Kay