

# Ending Bottled Water Sales at UVM

Gioia Thompson, Director of UVM Office of Sustainability 4/16/20





# Responding to Students 2008-2012



## Resolution in Support of a Sustainable Beverage System

WHEREAS, the University of Vermont has made a commitment to climate neutrality by the year 2020 as a signatory member of the American College and University President's Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) and claims in its Common Ground Mission to be "at the forefront of change" and "forward-looking in addressing important community and societal needs,"<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS, the University of Vermont claims in its Common Ground Mission to "unite against all forms of injustice" and to "reject bigotry, oppression, degradation, and harassment,"<sup>1</sup> of which human rights violations and unlivable wages are forms,

WHEREAS, the University's 10-year beverage contract with the Coca Cola Company<sup>2</sup> has offered little opportunity for the implementation of sustainability-related change on campus due to in part an unreasonable length of activation, a lack of formal student involvement, and the risk of the University incurring fines in the event of a 10 percent drop in Coca Cola sales on campus,

WHEREAS, the University currently sells approximately 1,037,000 single-use beverage bottles per year in vending machines and in retail areas,<sup>3</sup> a large majority of which are made from PET plastic, a non-biodegradable material notorious for the exorbitant amount of oil required for its processing<sup>4</sup> and its potential

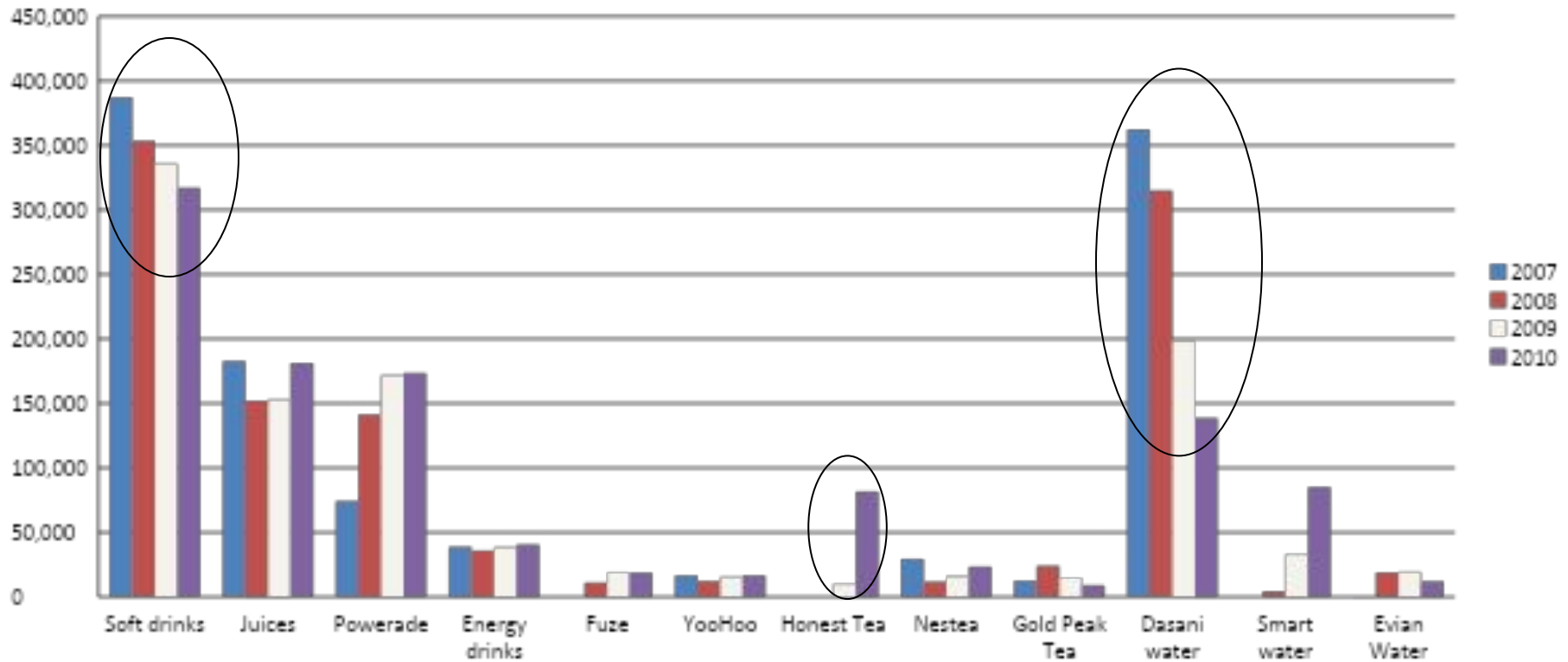


## Decisions 2012

1. End exclusive beverage sponsorship
2. Provide more diverse beverage choices
3. End sale of bottled water

# Studying the Data Before Deciding

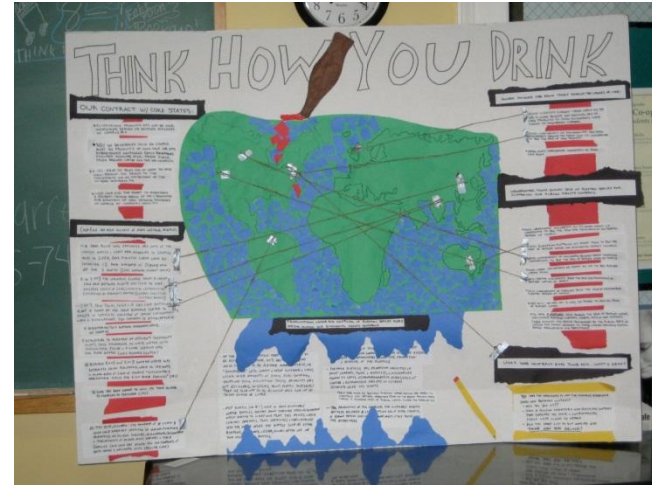
UVM 2007-2010 Retail & Vending Beverage Mix by Brand





# Making Academic Connections

- **Environmental Studies thesis 2011:** research national policy and student advocacy context
- **Fall class on social research methods:** survey student attitudes, behaviors, and ideas for fountain upgrade locations
- **Food Systems researchers:** track changes in healthiness of consumer choices, connect to Real Food Challenge and health
- **Intern re fountains**



# Deciding on Details

- Flat, unflavored, unadulterated water sales end January 2013
- Healthy options minimum 30% in vending (later 40%)
- Add bottle fillers
- Retrofit and upgrade fountains
- No filtration (too much maintenance)
- Add chillers (fewer bacteria, better taste)
- Not giving away bottles
- Limiting office water bubblers, installing taps where possible



# Installing Filling Stations

## Cook Physical Science

Last Updated by UVMsustain on Aug 27

Location: Cook Floors 1-5 South end of Hallway

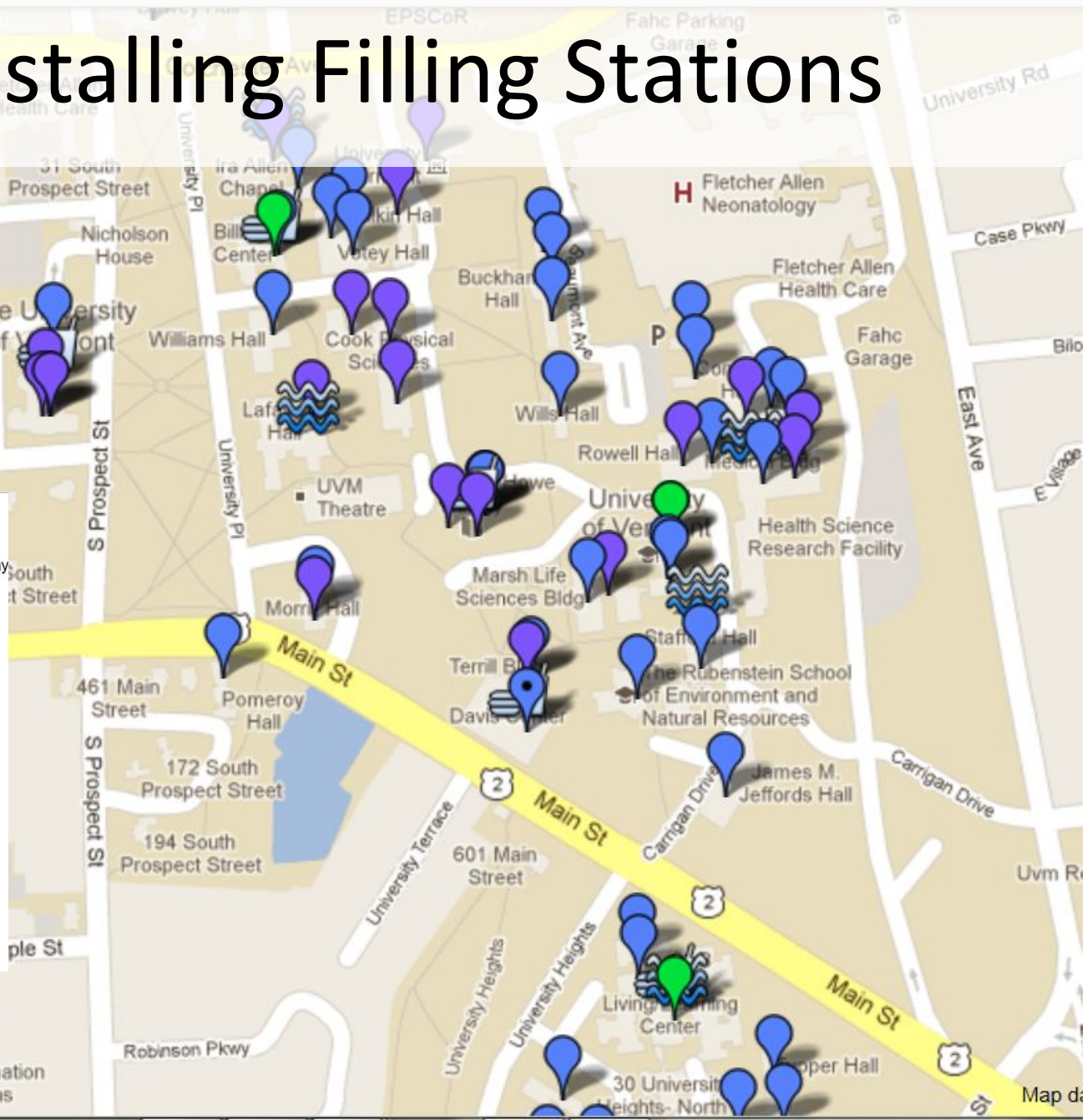
Chiller: Yes

Filler: Yes



500 ft

200 m





# Goal: 75 Filling Stations by 1/1/13



# Telling the Campus

- Signs on Bottle Filling Stations
- Directional signs
- Online map
- Dining cashiers' info sheets
- Bottled Water Retirement Party 12/5/12
- Staff Council, Student Gov't contacts





# Where is the water?

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**UVM is one of the first universities to end the sale of bottled water. UVM has made a commitment to support clean, local water free of charge across campus.  
Fill up your own bottle or cup for FREE! Ask where the closest water station is located.**



**Want to learn more?  
[uvm.edu/sustain/bottledwater](http://uvm.edu/sustain/bottledwater)**

# 2014 Update

- Ease of cleaning is key in deciding about new bottle fillers and fountains.
- One-time funding was spent. Fountains are managed through building operations & maintenance.
- Easy access to drinking water in retail dining areas needed to be addressed.
- Biggest physical challenge: providing water at large outdoor events.





# The Unintended Consequences of Changes in Beverage Options and the Removal of Bottled Water on a University Campus

Elizabeth R. Berman, BS, and Rachel K. Johnson, PhD, MPH, RD

**Objectives.** We investigated how the removal of bottled water along with a minimum healthy beverage requirement affected the purchasing behavior, healthiness of beverage choices, and consumption of calories and added sugars of university campus consumers.

**Methods.** With shipment data as a proxy, we estimated bottled beverage consumption over 3 consecutive semesters: baseline (spring 2012), when a 30% healthy beverage ratio was enacted (fall 2012), and when bottled water was removed (spring 2013) at the University of Vermont. We assessed changes in number and type of beverages and per capita calories, total sugars, and added sugars shipped.

**Results.** Per capita shipments of bottles, calories, sugars, and added sugars increased significantly when bottled water was removed. Shipments of healthy beverages declined significantly, whereas shipments of less healthy beverages increased significantly. As bottled water sales dropped to zero, sales of sugar-free beverages and sugar-sweetened beverages increased.

**Conclusions.** The bottled water ban did not reduce the number of bottles entering the waste stream from the university campus, the ultimate goal of the ban. With the removal of bottled water, consumers increased their consumption of less healthy bottled beverages. (*Am J Public Health*. Published online ahead of print April 16, 2015: e1–e5. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302593)

# Since 2015

1. Free, filtered cold water is now available in all retail dining outlets via fountain beverage machines.
2. At least 50% of beverage offerings must contain 40 or fewer calories per 8-ounce serving.
3. Coca-Cola Freestyle machines — with a free water option— were introduced in several retail and residential dining outlets. Reusable Freestyle bottles are available for purchase from UVM Dining.
4. 2020 update: unfortunately, the Freestyle machine option has not been popular with students, despite outreach efforts; this option is likely to be discontinued--too expensive.



# Conclusions

1. Many questions from other campuses based on Johnson's study. No followup has been conducted.
2. Systems on campus changed dramatically with new contract, plus more events. Can't compare before/after data.
3. Data sets are not comparable among institutions. No academic rewards to study complexity.

1. Lots of kudos from alumni. No pushback from community on the policy.
2. People are now used to carrying their own containers.
3. Educational opportunity: conducted "[UVMHeartsWater](#)" campaign to emphasize that the policy is about the WATER even more than the containers.

# Consider This for Your Campus

- **Conduct a “before” study** or survey to inform your campaign.
- **Teach students** to attach a reusable bottle to their backpacks.
- **Make outreach fun!** Ending bottled water dependence is about the student experience. Videos! Stickers! Taste tests!
- **Find funding for bottle fillers** on water fountains in key locations.
- **No need for fancy fountains.** Key is easy cleaning.
- **Find a peer institution.**
- **Call for ideas** about where to install what you can afford.
- **One bottle filler per building** on the first floor, minimum.
- **Document interest** with data
- **Gain support** from student government at least a year before the next big beverage/food contract.
- **Write up the language** for beverage/dining RFP to seek healthier options, alternatives to single-serve, disposable containers



# Learn More

[www.uvm.edu/sustain/bottledwater](http://www.uvm.edu/sustain/bottledwater)

[UVM Eco-Reps Presents: The Bottle Chase](#)

[UVMHeartsWater](#)

