

## Case Study:

# Ending Pouring Rights at the University of Vermont

**Background:** The University of Vermont (UVM) had a ten-year contract with Coca-Cola that was due to expire in the summer of 2012. In the few years leading up to end of the contract term, pressure from students mounted to create a sustainable beverage system on campus.

**Lead Advocates:** The Vermont Student Environmental Program (VSTEP) spearheaded the effort to create a sustainable beverage system on UVM's campus. VSTEP is a student run, non-profit organization created in 1988 to expand UVM's recycling program and address environmental issues on campus.

**Advocates' Primary Goal:** End sales of bottled water on campus.

### Strategies and Tactics:

- Raise awareness with Bring Your Own Bottle days and informational tabling events.
- Pass Student Government Association (SGA) resolutions on the harms of bottled water.
- Collect over 1200 signatures (more than 10 percent of all students!) from students in support of an [SGA resolution](#) calling for a sustainable beverage system.

**Outcome:** In January of 2013, UVM [became](#) one of the first institutions in the U.S. to end the sale of bottled water on campus and require that one-third of the drinks offered in vending machines be healthy options. The university installed additional water bottle refill stations and updated existing fountains. To facilitate the new sustainable beverage policy, university administrators agreed to let the Coca-Cola contract lapse without renewing in July 2012. From that point on, campus food service operations would purchase beverages from a mix of vendors, rather than sign a beverage contract with corporate sponsorship and exclusive pouring rights.

Initially, UVM experienced the unintended consequence of students substituting bottled water with other, less healthy bottled beverages. A [study](#) of purchase behavior three semesters after these changes were made found that the number of plastic bottles entering the waste stream had not changed. However, the study may not have accounted for the time it has taken for students to adapt to the changes, nor did it take into account additional changes the university has made since then, as they ironed out the kinks, so another study is warranted.

### Lessons Learned:

According to a 2021 interview with a key stakeholder in this effort:

- Obtain support from student government at least a year before the contract expiration date.
- To ensure success of a bottled water ban, lay the groundwork as early as possible by
  - educating the campus community to carry a reusable water bottle;
  - finding the funding for water bottle filling stations and their maintenance; and
  - asking students where they want water bottle filling stations installed on campus.

*For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at [policy@cspinet.org](mailto:policy@cspinet.org).*

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