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# Sugary Drinks Make Our Water Crisis Worse

The production, promotion, and consumption of sugary beverages have lasting health and environmental consequences. It's time we add them to the climate change conversation.

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BY [URIYOÁN COLÓN-RAMOS](#) AUGUST 13, 2024 2:22 PM

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**A**s presidential candidates prepare their platforms addressing climate change and our dwindling water resources, it is more important than ever to add sugary drinks to the conversation. The solutions to today's water deficit crisis must tackle the increasing epidemic of sugary drink consumption.

For individuals, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a report published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, [recommends](#) drinking plain water instead of sugary drinks to prevent diabetes, tooth decay, obesity, and heart disease, issues that cost us more than [\\$17 billion](#) in healthcare each decade. However, while Americans [overuse water](#) for industries like agriculture, we are not drinking it. Instead, we are drinking sugar-sweetened beverages.

Mounting evidence suggests that we turn to sugary drinks when we don't have

access to clean, safe, and palatable water. **Distrust in tap water**, low tap water consumption, and high sugary drink consumption are **common** among communities that have historically lacked piped water services or suffered from water safety breaks. When **bottled water** is not available, people who do not trust their tap water or **lack piped water** at home tend to opt instead for prepackaged sugary drinks.

More than one-third of Americans **feel unsure** about drinking their tap water. **Forty-six million Americans** live with **water insecurity**—meaning they don't have running water or that the water in their homes is unsafe to drink. A **2023 study** in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics demonstrated that families provided with a low-cost water filter started trusting the tap water enough to drink it and simultaneously decreased their sugary beverage intake. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the water crisis has contributed to a sugary drink and diabetes epidemic.

Demand for sugary drinks has also exacerbated the worldwide water crisis. The production of sugary beverages is an enormous waste of our dwindling supply of fresh drinking water.

Vast amounts of water are required to grow crops such as **corn** and **sugarcane** for the sweeteners commonly used in sugary drinks. Bottling a meager liter of soda uses 442 to 618 liters of fresh water, **according to experts**. In a Colombian municipality that houses a new Coca-Cola bottling plant, the company has been **reported** to consume 68.5 percent of the municipality's entire water use.

In India, [Coca-Cola has been called out](#) by researchers for continuously operating plants in severely water-stressed areas, depleting the aquifers. In [Brazil](#), advocacy groups and private citizens are concerned that Nestlé and Coca-Cola may negotiate for the rights to the Guarani Aquifer, one of the largest freshwater reservoirs in the world. While this claim is heavily [denied](#) by the same companies (who also deceptively [claim](#) water neutrality), it is common practice for governments, such as the one in [Puerto Rico](#), to allow corporations to use unlimited freshwater resources at no charge in their municipalities while their citizens lack access to safe, potable drinking water. (Not to mention, [bottled](#) beverages have led to a waste management and contamination crisis). Is it a surprise, then, that the places that are running out of water, like [Bogotá and Mexico City](#), also happen to have the [highest consumption](#) of sugary drinks?

Strategies to address water scarcity and sugary drinks must align—only then can they benefit [the planet](#) and its people. For example, Brazil has a proposal to institute strict agroecological zoning laws for growing of sugarcane and plans for the sugar and its byproducts to generate [bioethanol](#).

Similar approaches to address water and sugary drinks are long overdue in the United States. The 2024 [Farm, Food, and National Security Act](#) reflects the needs of sugarcane farmers, and the Biden Administration has made historic investments in [water infrastructure](#). And yet, these initiatives remain disconnected; the outputs of one potentially become obstacles to the goals of the other. Our shot at tackling water scarcity is drying up fast if we fail to recognize the interconnected impacts and opportunities linked to sugary drink production and promotion.

*This column was produced for [Progressive Perspectives](#), a project of The Progressive magazine, and distributed by Tribune News Service.*

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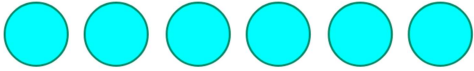
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