

Keeping SB Healthy, Sustainable, & Equitable: Beverages and their impacts on our community

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Keeping Santa Barbara healthy and safe should be a top priority for any community member. We rely on each other to maintain a thriving, adaptable, and progressive city; however, sometimes the stability of our community can be jeopardized by large corporations that have the funds and influence to manipulate the environment we live in.

Global corporations, mainly PepsiCo and Coca-Cola, infiltrate food and beverage environments with sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) that undermine public health in the Santa Barbara region. SSBs are beverages that contain added sugars, like sucrose and high fructose corn syrup, and include soda, sweetened fruit juices, energy drinks, teas, and coffees. Added sugar in SSBs are associated with [weight gain and increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, dental disease and obesity](#). SSB consumption is also associated with poorer diet quality, e.g. [energy drinks with unhealthy diets in college students inflate the possibility of disease](#). These destructive products are heavily marketed towards the youth in our community, the [demographic most susceptible](#) to these diseases and future health complications. Not only are industry titans, like Pepsi, targeting the malleable lives of our youth, but their products pollute our natural environment, e.g. PepsiCo and CocaCola were the [two top global sources of plastic pollution in 2020](#).

The community of Santa Barbara has been a leader of the environmental movement since the 1969 oil spill that led to the creation of Earth Day in 1970. Local organizations such as the Environmental Defense Center and the SurfRider Foundation work to increase environmental protection by defending native habitats, preserving waterways, and much more. While Santa Barbara as a whole seems to be riding the growing wave of global environmental awareness, the prevalence of single-use plastics, such as the ubiquitous PepsiCo plastic beverage bottles at UCSB, hinders the city's sustainability progress. In late 2020, Break Free From Plastic, a global movement pushing for solutions to the plastic pollution crisis, named PepsiCo as one of the world's top three plastic polluters. [Sales of single use plastic](#) beverage containers have increased from <150 billion (B) in 1999 to 550B in 2019. These plastics degrade slowly, [persisting in the environment](#) for up to a thousand years, [damaging ecosystems](#), harming terrestrial and marine life, and polluting water, air, and soil. Additionally, microplastic particles are known to accumulate within human tissue leading to [potential health issues](#) we are only just beginning to understand, such as respiratory diseases and cancer. The heavy promotion of, and reliance on, single-use plastic beverage containers at UCSB impedes Santa Barbara's vision of a sustainable future and makes the community complicit in PepsiCo's damaging environmental practices.

At the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are strategically subtle in convenience stores, vending machines, and sports events through extensive advertising and display. UCSB's pouring rights contract (PRC) with PepsiCo gives the beverage company exclusive rights to promote and sell their products at university events and venues. While there are countless beverage options available to the campus community, up to

[75% of the shelf space](#) in certain campus convenience stores are dominated by PepsiCo products. The agreement makes healthy beverages less convenient, restricts the sales of non-PepsiCo bottled beverages, and allots UCSB approximately [\\$6,000,000, over the course of 10 years](#), to actively facilitate the promotion and sales of PepsiCo beverages. UCSB prides itself on being a leader in environmental sustainability, health promotion, and equal opportunity, so why are these values left unacknowledged within the UCSB-PepsiCo PRC?

The UC Healthy Beverage Initiative (HBI), part of the UC Healthy Campus Network, aims to increase tap water accessibility and decrease SSB consumption at all 10 UC campuses. At UCSB, the HBI research group (HBIRG) aims to spark discussions about the environmental, health and social equity implications of the PRC as well. The UCSB HBIRG consists of student researchers that investigate how the campus beverage environment can be more inclusive and consistent with our UC and UCSB health, equity, and environmental goals.

As graduating UCSB students, and part of the UCSB HBIRG, we hope that Santa Barbara gets more involved in spreading awareness of the negative public and environmental health impacts of SSBs and the large influence beverage companies have on our community. Let's work together to keep Santa Barbara healthy and thriving for many future generations to come!