

Nestlé makes billions bottling water it pays nearly nothing for

By Caroline Winter, *New York Times*

In rural Mecosta County, Mich., sits a near-windowless facility with a footprint about the size of Buckingham Palace. It's just one of Nestlé's roughly 100 bottled water factories in 34 countries around the world.

Inside, workers wear hairnets, hard hats, goggles, gloves, and earplugs. Ten production lines snake through the space, funneling local spring water into 8-ounce to 2.5-gallon containers; most of the lines run 24/7, each pumping out 500 to 1,200 bottles per minute. About 60 percent of the supply comes from Mecosta's springs and arrives at the factory via a 12-mile pipeline. The rest is trucked in from neighboring Osceola County, about 40 miles north. "Daily, we're looking at 3.5 million bottles potentially," says Dave Sommer, the plant's 41-year-old manager, shouting above the din.

Silos holding 125 tons of plastic resin pellets provide the raw material for the bottles. They're molded into shape at temperatures reaching 400F before being filled, capped, inspected, labeled, and laser-printed with the location, day, and minute they were produced—a process that takes less than 25 seconds. Next, the bottles are bundled, shrink-wrapped onto pallets, and picked up by a fleet of 25 forklifts that ferry them to the plant's warehouse or loading docks. As many as 175 trucks arrive every day to transport the water to retail locations in the Midwest. "We want more people to drink water, keep hydrated," Sommer says. "It would be nice if it were my water, but we just want them to drink water."

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