

Setting up a bottled water plant

Answers to key questions

Which type of water do you have?

Water type

There are three types of bottled water:

- Natural Mineral Water
- Spring Water
- Bottled Drinking Water, sometimes referred to as table water.

A **Natural Mineral Water** must:

- come from a named groundwater source
- be of suitable quality from the ground without undergoing treatments which would alter its natural character. It is permitted to filter out unstable elements and to add carbon dioxide to make it sparkle.
- be chemically stable over time – tested over 2 years to demonstrate a lack of seasonal variation.

Spring water must meet similar quality standards, and come from a named groundwater source, but may be treated within strict guidelines. **Bottled Drinking Water** can be sourced from groundwater or tap and may be treated to ensure it meets the prescribed quality standards. Whatever the designation, the water is then packaged either in small glass bottles, PET, cans or recyclable cooler bottles. Your market research and your water quality and source protection will guide you on the packaging and labelling route to take.

What do you need to do?

Regulation

All bottled waters in the UK are governed by the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water Regulations. These rigorous regulations specify the standards for water quality, labelling requirements, bottling and permitted treatment, health and other marketing claims that may or may not be made. Natural Mineral Water must go through a lengthy **recognition procedure** through the local authority, the enforcing body. You should consult your local authority and experienced hydrogeological consultancy if you intend to sell a water or to apply for recognition of your source as a **Natural Mineral Water**.

Source and licensing

For bottling you need to have suitable buildings for a bottling plant or land with planning permission. Spring Water and Natural Mineral Water must be **bottled at source**; you cannot tanker to a bottling plant elsewhere. To extract the water from the ground you will need a **hygienically designed borehole** or spring capture structure and you will require a **water abstraction licence** from the EA/NRW. A hydrogeological consultancy with experience of advising on feasibility, water testing, source construction, recognition and licensing processes should be engaged.

How much does it cost?

Costs

Costs vary, but to deliver a return on investment a bottling plant needs to be of a certain size. Food grade piping must be used throughout and the entire process must be spotlessly hygienic. You'll need a suitably constructed water source, delivery pipework, a bottling line, usually an in-house testing laboratory and warehousing. If employing staff you will need to ensure that your employment conditions comply with the regulations. As a rule of thumb, the cost of establishing a reasonable sized bottling plant is **at least £2million** for water source infrastructure, bottling plant equipment and labelling. Transport, marketing and staffing costs will be additional.

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