

Policy Proposal- Legalize vending of ready-to-eat foods

Food carts are the most affordable, practical start-up for culinary entrepreneurs, whether they are recent immigrants, recent graduates, recently inspired, or recently unemployed. Food carts can bring a wide variety of foods affordably into a wide variety of neighborhoods. Food carts are green businesses that can enliven public spaces and increase public safety. Food carts can be key ingredients in Chicago's Recipe for Healthy Places. Yet, Chicago outlaws sidewalk vendors who sell anything other than frozen desserts or whole produce. By changing the current frozen desserts vendor license to allow carts to sell a wide variety of prepared foods, Chicago can open up opportunities for entrepreneurs to earn an honest living and give Chicagoans access to safe, affordable, convenient foods where they live, shop, and work.

Now

- Mobile Food licenses require a motorized vehicle, except for vendors selling frozen desserts or whole produce. Vendors may not sell sandwiches, yogurt, soup, tamales, or fruit salad from carts or bike trailers.
- Many Chicagoans want to earn an honest living as sidewalk vendors, but there is no way for them to get a license.
 - Vendors selling corn, tamales, and fruit salads have faced fines and jail time, even if they have sanitation certificates and peddler licenses.
 - Creative business ideas like the Brew Hub coffee bike, a cookie bike, a meat pie trike, and a yogurt cart are turned away at City Hall. Other creative entrepreneurs don't start businesses because they can't afford to do it legally.
- The City cannot ensure that vendors' food is safe for public consumption.

Problem

By making most food carts illegal, Chicago has banned low-budget culinary entrepreneurship and deprived Chicagoans of safe, fun food on the go.

Compare

Portland has flexible rules about food carts, and it has built a thriving vending economy and great culinary reputation.

Proposal

- Expand the existing Mobile Frozen Desserts Vendor license to include all prepared, packaged foods.
- To ensure food safety, the health department consults on cart and menu initially and all food must be pre-packaged in a licensed kitchen.
 - Vendors could prepare food themselves in commercial kitchens, but only if separately licensed to do so.
- Hot and cold foods must be maintained at the proper temperatures specified in the Code.

Note: This proposed ordinance is already written by The IJ Clinic on Entrepreneurship, on behalf of the Street Vendor Justice Coalition

Impact

- Many low-income Chicagoans would have a legal, viable way to create jobs in starter businesses.
- Vendors could sell a variety of prepared foods on Chicago's sidewalks, ranging from fruit cups and hummus to yogurt and tamales.
- The Health Department could efficiently ensure that vendors' food is safe for the public.
 - Health could inspect carts at City Hall and kitchens where vendors prepare their food, rather than tracking down individual vendors.
- Chicago would build on its reputation as a city of neighborhoods and a culinary capital.