

LEGAL SIDEWALK VENDING: a tool for healthy communities

Street food culture in the Los Angeles area reflects the diversity, vibrancy, and cultural pride of the region. It presents opportunities for food access, entrepreneurship, and lively street life. However, its current illegal status in many cities hinders potential community benefits and penalizes vendors who are trying to support their families and are eager to enter the legal economy.

DID YOU KNOW?

The sale of food on sidewalks from carts or stands is illegal in the large majority of the 88 cities in Los Angeles County, including in the City of Los Angeles and in unincorporated areas of the County. Los Angeles City is the only one of the ten largest cities in the country without a legal permit system for sidewalk vendors. Despite the bans, an estimated 12,000 sidewalk vendors operate in LA County.

BENEFITS of LEGALIZATION

Since most sidewalk vendors currently operate outside of the law, cities do not have tools to influence where, what and how they sell food. There is scattered enforcement of vending bans and health codes, but since vendors operate in a gray market, vending springs up again after police or health department sweeps. Legalization and regulation of sidewalk vending in cities in Los Angeles County would create benefits for vendors, for the public, and for municipalities by bringing vending "out of the shadows" so it can play an important role as a source of food, economic opportunity and vibrant city life. Legal sidewalk vending can:

- Promote walkability and street life
- Provide entrepreneurship in high unemployment areas
- Allow regulation of what food is sold
- Create health and safety regulations for street food
- Provide incentives for vending of healthy food
- Increase access to fresh produce in currently produce-deprived areas
- Promote cultural diversity and social connections

PERMITS & REGULATIONS:

Legalization of sidewalk vending would establish a permit system allowing vendors to do business on public sidewalks. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health already establishes and enforces health inspections and grades similar to those currently allocated to restaurants. Regulations would set a process for applying for a permit and the cost of a permit, and determine when and where carts can do business.

HEALTHY FOOD VENDING:

Residents of many low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles have inadequate access to supermarkets, sit-down restaurants and fresh produce. Diabetes and obesity is higher in these low income communities than in more affluent areas. Sidewalk vending already reaches neighborhoods and so is a promising tool to enhance access to healthful food. While some vendors sell snacks or fried foods, a survey of mobile vendors in South Los Angeles found that 25% of vendors already sell whole and/or cut fruits or vegetables. A permit system to legalize sidewalk vending should also incentivize sale of healthy items:

- Discounted permits to healthy vendors
- Expedited permit process for healthy vendors
- Greater access for healthy vendors to areas restricted to other vendors (i.e. nearby schools)

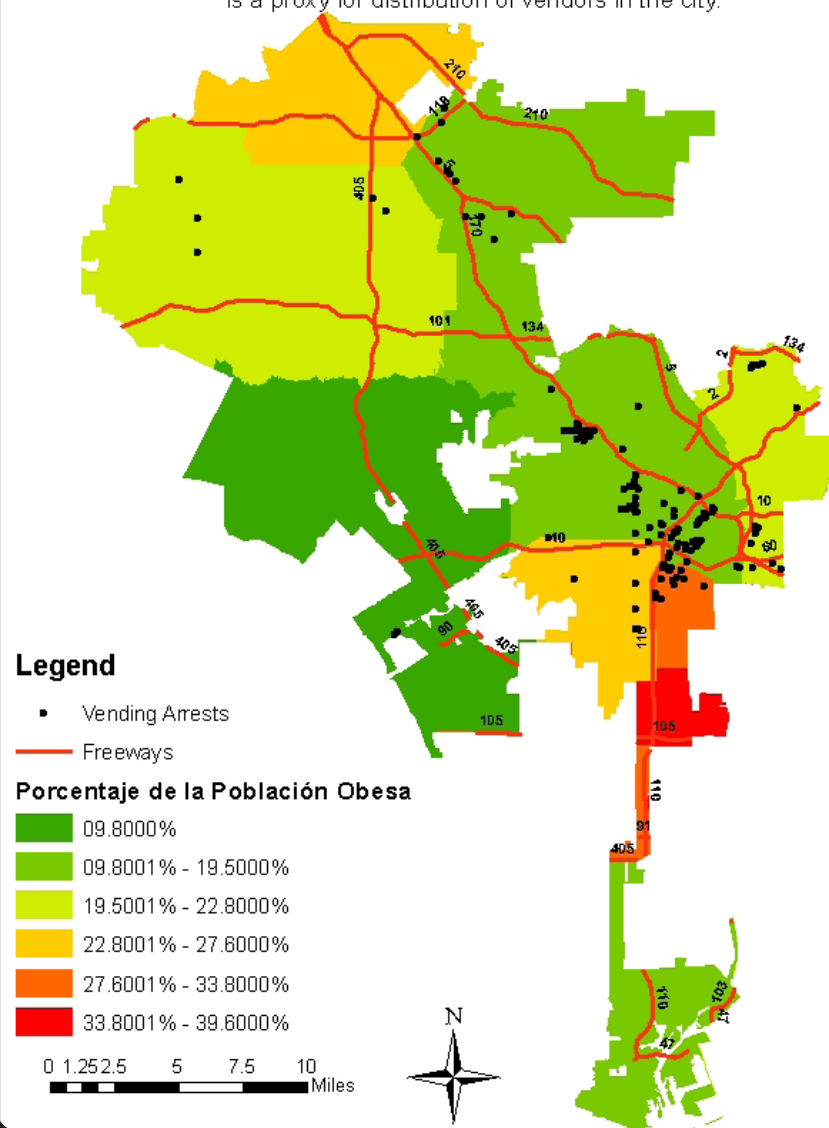
Sidewalk vending is already an integral part of the patchwork of Los Angeles County. Legalizing sidewalk vending would benefit communities and cities by increasing economic opportunities, expanding access to healthy and affordable food and maintaining vibrant public places.



Photo by Rudy Espinoza

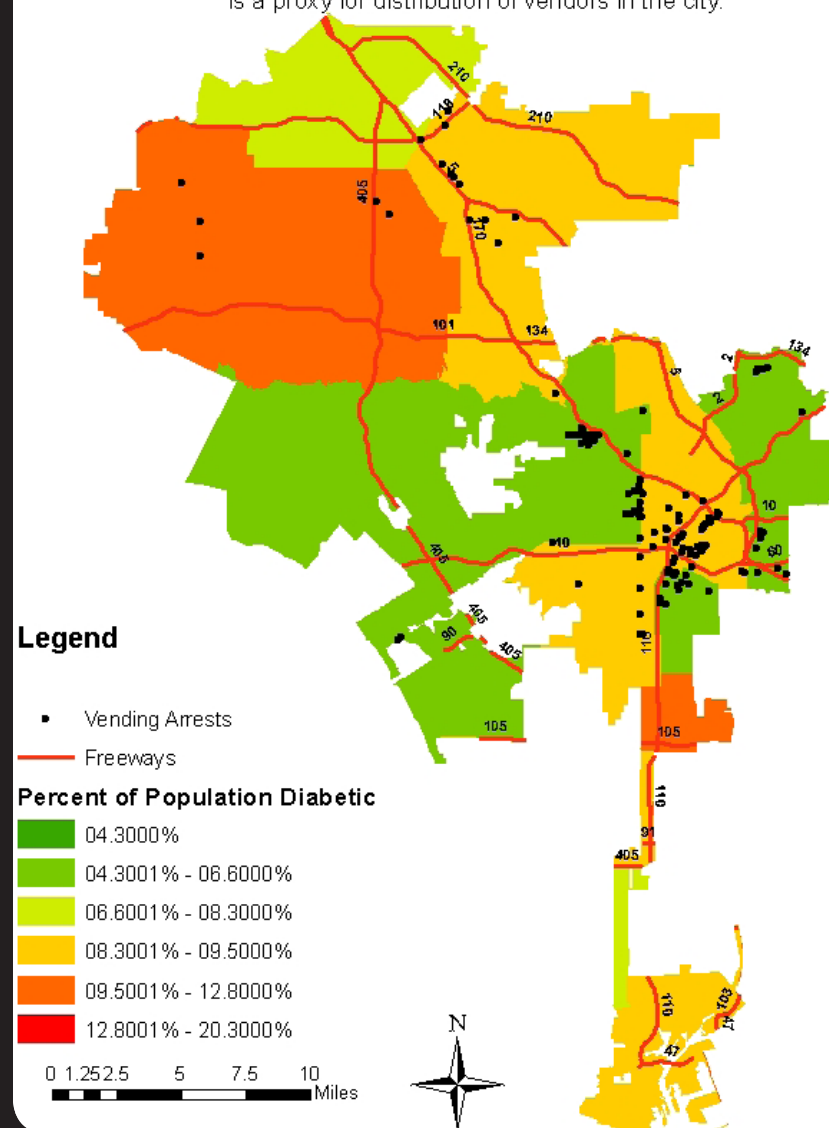
Heavily Vended Areas* and Obesity in the City of Los Angeles

*Location of arrests of sidewalk vendors by the Bureau of Street Services is a proxy for distribution of vendors in the city.



Heavily Vended Areas* and Diabetes Rates in the City of L.A.

*Location of arrests of sidewalk vendors by the Bureau of Street Services is a proxy for distribution of vendors in the city.



For more information, please visit:

Los Angeles Street Vendor Campaign: <http://streetvendorcampaign.blogspot.com>

Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College: <http://uepi.oxy.edu/our-projects/food-and-transportation> or mvalli@oxy.edu