



## Food Fight Erupts Over Popular Chinatown Greenmarket

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CHINATOWN — Street-vending supporters gathered at a greenmarket on Forsyth Street Wednesday to charge police with “harassing” vendors at the bustling open-air bazaar located at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge.

Members of the [Street Vendor Project](#) at the [Urban Justice Center](#) claimed police have been unfairly targeting the high-traffic market by issuing hundreds of summonses to sellers who serve a predominantly Asian clientele.

They [reported more than 2,000 tickets were issued to vendors there in 2009 and 2010](#) for offenses ranging from overflowing items in public space to parking and sanitation abuses. Advocates added that vendors at the popular outdoor market in Union Square have comparatively received “no more than a handful” of summonses for similar offenses.



Produce vendors line Forsyth Street next to the Manhattan Bridge. (DNAinfo/Patrick Hedlund)

“The bigger issue is, why are you harassing the vendors at this market when they’re doing a good thing?” said Sean Basinski, executive director of the Street Vendor Project. “What is that doing to the health of Chinatown?”

The 5th Precinct — which Basinski claimed is leading the ticketing blitz — has stood by its actions, saying the block had become filthy and that scofflaw motorists park their produce trucks on the curb overnight in violation of parking regulations.

“That place looked like a zoo,” the precinct’s commanding officer, Inspector Gin Yee, said at a community council meeting last month, noting that vendors throw rotting produce onto the sidewalk and street, and also don’t properly refrigerate their food.

“We’re going to clean it up.”

Barricades were recently placed along Forsyth Street next to the market to prevent trucks from parking there — a move Basinski claimed was used to cripple vendors on the stretch.

“They were grasping at straws,” he said of the enforcement measure. “The main thing is for the police to lay off.”

Nonetheless, Yee stood by the precinct’s actions, adding that sanitation crews needed to access the curb for street cleaning and that the wall next to vendors had to be scrubbed of graffiti.

“We’ve had relaxed enforcement for years. We’re going to clean up this mess now,” he said at the meeting last month. “We have vendors that basically break all the rules.”

Advocates argued that the vendors are vital to Chinatown because they provide cheap fruit and vegetables to low-income residents.

“This is what the city claims they want,” said Street Vendor Project board member Bernard Haynes, of the city’s support of greenmarkets. “I think they’re biting off their nose to spite their face.”

The city intends to expand the curb space next to the bridge where the vendors operate under a plan to redevelop a derelict public plaza nearby.

Supporters of the market also called on the City Council to pass pending legislation that would lower the maximum fine for street vendors from \$1,000 to \$250.

One Upper West Side resident who regularly visits the Forsyth Street market for its inexpensive fare said she can’t afford to shop elsewhere for fresh produce.

“At least they have a reasonable price,” said Marizel Woody, 49, who added that vendors are friendly and will often throw in extra items at no charge. “I come here every day. They’re cheaper and better.”