

# The Epoch Times

## Overwhelmed by Fines, Forsyth Street Market Withers

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AT THE MARKET: A woman is helped by a vendor at the Forsyth Street market on Wednesday. Vendors claim the NYPD is harassing them by issuing excessive summons with fines of up to \$1000. (Amal Chen/The Epoch Times)

NEW YORK—A once-vibrant produce market on Forsyth Street is losing both vendors and customers due to constant pressure from the NYPD and the Department of Health.

The popular market beneath the off-ramp of the Manhattan Bridge has dwindled to a few dozen vendors, who [report](#) a 40-percent decrease in business over the past year.

A report detailing harassment by the police department was released by the vendors at a protest, organized by the Street Vendor Project, at the market on Wednesday.

According to the report, vendors at the market have received 949 Environmental Control Board (ECB) tickets over the course of two years, averaging 1.3 tickets per day. This is 19 percent more than the number of tickets issued at four of the city's other largest outdoor markets, combined.

More than half of the tickets were issued for a single violation, 17-315(c) of the City [Administrative](#) Code, which prohibits any items to be placed next to a cart. Fines for this and other violations increase to \$1,000 after the fifth offense.

“The Street Vendor Project has been working on this project for years, and over the last six months we pushed to make changes. There are two bills sitting at the City Council right now,

bills 434 and 435. Once these bills pass, it would lower the fines from \$1,000 and it would be better for all vendors, all throughout the boroughs, and especially [for] the Forsyth vendors,” said James Williams, board member of the Street Vendor Project. “We want to bring it back to the original cap of \$250.”

Although not a single police car passed the market while the press [conference](#) was held, according to both market visitors and vendors, police vehicles normally patrol the block every 20 minutes. Officers pull over to issue ECB and criminal summonses. No data is available on how many criminal summonses have been issued, but vendors report that police issue just as many of those as ECB tickets.

“It’s pretty obvious that Forsyth Street is being targeted, and they’re using the \$1,000 tickets as a way of chasing you away from here,” said Bernard Haynes, board member of the Street Vendor Project.

The Forsyth Street Market was started in 2005, when a group of street vendors were forced to move from Division Street and took up the space on Forsyth Street. Back then, the street was inhabited by homeless people and utilized mostly as a public restroom. The street vendors cleaned up the area and turned it into the biggest produce market in any low-income area in New York City.

Thousands of customers, over 90 percent of whom are Asian-Americans, visit the neatly stocked carts at the market daily. Customers prefer the fresh produce and low prices. Two pounds of tomatoes, green beans, broccoli, or green peppers are sold for \$1.25. Four pounds of lychee fruit go for \$10, compared to \$13.30 per pound from FreshDirect.

“I come here every day. There are times I can’t even shop to buy vegetables where I live at, because where I live at it’s very expensive. So at least here they have a reasonable price,” said Marizel Wooby, 49.

Wooby added that she sees police cars drive by the area every 10 minutes and that the officers frequently stop to issue tickets. She prefers the market because vendors quickly develop a personal relationship with the customers and often give extra produce to the regulars.

Several initiatives by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Council Speaker Christine Quinn aim to eliminate “food deserts,” areas where little or no fresh produce is available, in an ongoing effort to reduce [obesity](#) and [diabetes](#) in the city. Members of the Street Vendor Project wonder why a market that clearly serves the purpose of providing fresh produce to a low-income neighborhood would be singled out by law enforcement.

Vendors at the Union Square Greenmarket are never issued tickets for the same offenses and are virtually insulated from fines because the jurisdiction for patrolling the area has been handed over to a different agency, according to the Street Vendor Project. In the meantime, the Forsyth Market is losing both long-term vendors and customers.

“Before at this time you could see like a pack of people. Plus there were a lot more vendors,” said Ali Mohammed, 21, a street vendor at the market for the past year.

There are 29 co-sponsors for the City Council bills that would reduce the maximum fines issued to street vendors. The Street Vendor Project expects a vote in the fall.