

A New Report Says Cops Really Like Ticketing the Forsyth Street Produce Vendors

By Rebecca Marx

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Urban Justice Center

If you thought the city was giving food-truck drivers a hard time, consider the plight of Forsyth Street's fruit and vegetable vendors.

Over the past few years, city government officials have populated our streets with 1,000 fruit and vegetable carts designed to encourage the consumption of healthy food, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. But for some reason, they're not wild about the produce vendors who have been stationed for six years at the bottom of Forsyth Street, in the shadow of the Manhattan Bridge.

Recently, the police and health departments have been cracking down on vendors with almost daily sweeps and the strict enforcement of vending regulations, which have resulted in tickets, arrests, and the confiscation and destruction of produce and vending equipment. As [Bowery Boogie](#) reported, the crackdowns seem to have started right around the time *Men in Black III* filmed in the area and brought the market to the city's attention.

Yesterday, the vendors staged a protest in tandem with a press conference from the Urban Justice Center, which also released a [report](#) detailing the extent of the damages the market has suffered. And it's pretty nuts: Working from data released by the Environmental Control Board, the UJC estimates that vendors received 2,000 tickets over the past two years. Between 2009 and 2010, police and health inspectors wrote an average of one ticket every three days.

The vast majority were for the failure to display merchandise only on or below their six-foot-wide carts. As many vendors have argued, that's too small a space to sell enough produce to turn a profit, and the cheap prices of the produce have attracted a steady clientele over the years. The second most common tickets were issued to vendors who failed to properly display their licenses. And because vending penalties increase with each offense, many vendors quickly reach the mandatory \$1,000-per-ticket limit. Some now owe \$20,000 in fines.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the Union Square Greenmarket, whose vendors, the report points out, are exempt from many of the regulations that apply to their Forsyth Street counterparts. There aren't cart-placement regulations, and vendors aren't required to have vending permits or licenses. Aside from placing a [temporary ban](#) on the practice of cheese cutting, the city seems content to leave Union Square alone.

The city is moving forward in developing a public plaza on Forsyth Street that will accommodate vendors, but construction isn't expected to start until the middle of 2012. Until then, Forsyth Street's vendors may want to get a few celebrity chefs and a couple busloads of well-heeled Caucasians to back their cause -- it seems they make all the difference in the eyes of the law.