



# THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND CHICAGO FOOD CART LEGALIZATION

For years, food trucks were a major policy debate and public focus in Chicago, which left food-cart vendors in the shadows, struggling to earn a living. Much of this was due to the fact that food carts are primarily low-income, first-generation immigrants. Our team set out to change that.

## STORYTELLING

*We made a documentary-style video that went viral.*

Think Freely Media's video and content team spent early mornings in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago with the Street Vendors Association, meeting and interviewing local street vendors. The fruit of their labors was a short documentary called "Una mujer y su carrito" ("A woman and her cart"), which chronicled the daily routine of 62-year-old Mexican immigrant Claudia Perez, who for years worked in the shadow of the law to make a living and support her family.



**PARTNER NAME:** Illinois Policy

**LOCATION:** Chicago

**GOAL:** Lift Chicago's ban on food carts.

**RESULTS:** On Sept. 24, 2015, Chicago City Council voted "yes" on an ordinance to legalize food carts, giving thousands of street vendors across the city the freedom to make an honest living and opening the door for the next generation of culinary entrepreneurs.

**STRATEGY:** Create grassroots momentum by connecting key Chicago audiences with the street-vending community through real stories to dispel myths and show the economic benefit of lifting the city's ban on food carts.

**"[UNA MUJER Y SU CARRITO] HAS BEEN VIEWED MORE THAN 1.1 MILLION TIMES...NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF THESE VIEWS WERE ORGANIC."**

The video was released in February 2015. The team leveraged Facebook's video capability to target Latinos age 25 and older ranging from Spanish-dominant to English-dominant. The video has been viewed more than 1.1 million times since then; nearly three-quarters of these views were organic, meaning viewers came across the video and watched on their own.

We met with Claudia following the release of her video and she shared with us that people from as far away as St. Louis had traveled to Chicago to buy her tamales.

## THE MOVEMENT GAINED MOMENTUM AND SUPPORT

Attached to the video was an online petition to support Claudia and the effort to legalize food carts. The petition featured an illustration by Think Freely Media Cartoonist Eric Allie that portrayed Claudia Perez caught between Chicago cronies and police enforcement. Nearly 7,000 individuals signed the food cart petition; 75 percent of signatures came from Democrats and Independents. Nearly 60 percent of all petition signatures came from Latinos.

The video also introduced Claudia to the Chicago media and finally put a face on a grassroots movement that was continuing to grow.

Chicagoist, a well-known website popular among Chicago Millennials, ran an article, "Why Doesn't Chicago Have Its Own Food Carts?" promoting Claudia's video in March 2015.

NPR and their local Chicago affiliate, WBEZ, ran stories on the movement to legalize food carts shortly after that. The story also gained attention among Spanish-language media including Latino USA and Univision.

The efforts, not surprisingly, caught the attention of several influential aldermen and even Mayor

Rahm Emanuel, who came out in support of food-cart legalization. When that happens, legislation tends to move quickly.

## A FINAL PUSH BEFORE THE BIG VOTE

With a vote scheduled in September, our media team generated nearly 50 earned media appearances in the month leading up to the vote.

We secured placements with all the major Chicago television stations, including NBC Chicago, ABC 7 Chicago, CBS 2 Chicago, Fox Chicago and WGN-TV. The team also placed stories with the top Spanish-language media outlets such as Univision, Telemundo and Hoy.

On Sept. 24, the Chicago City Council voted unanimously to lift the ban on food carts in Chicago. Food-cart vendors can now sell delicious food in neighborhoods across the city without fear of heavy fines and police harassment.

**"NEARLY 7,000 INDIVIDUALS SIGNED THE FOOD CART PETITION: 75 PERCENT OF SIGNATURES CAME FROM DEMOCRATS AND INDEPENDENTS."**

