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Food trucks are one of the fastest growing sectors of the restaurant industry in the U.S. economy. Long considered the domain of hot dogs and ice cream carts, a new wave of mobile food has taken North America by storm in the form of chicken tikka masala burritos, short rib empanadas, and crème brûlée. With sales in the U.S. of nearly \$700 million in 2013 (representing 1% of sales in the U.S. restaurant industry), food trucks are projected to quadruple their economic impacts to \$2.7 billion by 2017.

A recent workshop hosted by the [Economic Developers Council of Ontario](#) and the [Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance](#) explored the story and impacts of food trucks in Canada. The workshop brought together economic development professionals, city planners, by-law managers (and more) from across Ontario to share their experiences with food trucks and to learn some of the best practices to help foster a [food truck friendly community](#).

The workshop revealed that there is in fact a lot of good work being done in Canada to promote food trucks. The City of Hamilton is one of the leaders in the industry with over 50 food trucks calling the city home, but other jurisdictions like [Halifax](#), Ottawa, and [Calgary](#) have food truck scenes that are gaining some solid traction, while smaller municipalities have also begun thinking about the positive impacts food trucks can have in their community.

Developing a food truck friendly community takes dedication and many years of creating partnerships within the food industry. Some of the [biggest opposition](#) to food trucks comes from already established “brick and mortar” restaurants fearing that food trucks will act as competition (with the unfair advantages of paying cheap licenses and not having to adhere to the same standards as restaurants). This division usually leads to pressure on municipal leaders to create more restrictive regulations for food trucks, limiting the hours they can operate, where they can operate from, and the structure of licensing fees. Stiffer regulations can easily dis-incentivize food truck entrepreneurs from entering the industry because it is too risky. After all, food trucks are run by entrepreneurs like those in any other industry and need to be nurtured to succeed.

But there are some great success stories where the restaurant industry and food trucks have come together for mutual gain. The City of Hamilton is the showcase example where food trucks were embraced early on by restaurant owners recognizing that the overall food culture in Hamilton needed to grow. By seeing food trucks as community and culture builders that bring people out to areas they haven’t been before, the partnership between restaurants and food trucks has resulted in a healthy and growing culture of food in Hamilton. The food truck event [Sew Hungry](#) is a good example of how a local Hamilton BIA harnessed this partnership to benefit their member businesses. The yearly day-long event features 35 food trucks parked along the length of Ottawa Street in the east end of Hamilton, drawing 30,000 people to the area in 2014 with an \$800,000 economic impact. Some of the restaurants along Ottawa Street reported selling out of food while shops were overflowing with people.

The food landscape in North America is changing rapidly. Food trucks are quickly transforming our impressions of what mobile food can be and have [incorporated technology and social media in new and exciting ways](#). With few complaints from the public to by-law managers, food trucks are not the menace they are sometimes made out to be. By creating the right incentives for these trucks and treating them like any other entrepreneur, food trucks have the real potential of contributing to a local food culture while also helping to revitalize areas that may be looking for that special spark.

*If you’re interested in learning more, the National League of Cities highlights the impact of the rapidly changing mobile vending industry on municipalities in their report [Food on Wheels: Mobile Vending Goes Mainstream](#) where they explore best practices for municipal leaders to take advantage of the benefits of food trucks.*

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