



# RON ROBERTS

CHAIRMAN  
SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** February 28, 2012

**08**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** THE FOOD TRUCK MOVEMENT NEEDS AN UPGRADE (DISTRICTS:  
ALL)

### SUMMARY:

#### Overview

In the 1950s, San Diego County became one of the first municipalities in California to grade regional restaurants on issues related to health. The inspection system has evolved over the years and is now based on food safety risk. Our primary goal was, and is, to reduce food-borne illness.

Throughout our county, the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) issues restaurant letter grades to help consumers make informed food-safety dining choices. Establishments that prepare ready to eat food receive a letter grade card of A, B or C, while those that carry and sell only pre-packaged food items are not graded. Studies show the letter grading program increases compliance with recommended food safety practices in commercial food establishments, improves inspection scores and influences consumers' restaurant choices.

Today, I am asking the Board to consider extending the restaurant letter grading system to mobile food facilities, in particular those that prepare food.

#### Recommendation(s)

##### **[CHAIRMAN ROBERTS**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to improve public notification signage for mobile food facilities that prepare and serve food by establishing a letter grading system similar to that used by the Department of Environmental Health to rate restaurants.
2. Report back to the Board within 120 days on the feasibility, timeline for implementation, proposed updates to ordinances in the unincorporated area and regional cities, and potential fiscal impacts and changes to the fee structure

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associated with operating the new grading system. ]

**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact associated with approving these recommendations.

**Business Impact Statement**

N/A

**Advisory Board Statement**

N/A

**[BACKGROUND:**

In the 1950s, San Diego County became one of the first municipalities in California to grade regional restaurants on issues related to health. The inspection system has evolved over the years and is now based on food safety risk. Our primary goal was, and is, to reduce food-borne illness.

Throughout our county, the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) issues restaurant letter grades to help consumers make informed food-safety dining choices. Establishments that prepare ready to eat food receive a letter grade card of A, B or C, while those that carry and sell only pre-packaged food items are not graded. Studies show the letter grading program increases compliance with recommended food safety practices in commercial food establishments, improves inspection scores and influences consumers' restaurant choices.

Today, I am asking the Board to consider extending the restaurant letter grading system to mobile food facilities, in particular those that prepare food. For our purposes, mobile food facilities include hot food trucks and carts that prepare food.

Food trucks have evolved from a means of getting a convenient bite to eat on a construction site, to being a source of unique, appetizing delicacies purchased anywhere the vehicle can lawfully conduct business. Some of the trucks are extensions of top quality restaurants like the Cohn Family chain, which recently debuted two new eateries on wheels: "Chop Soo-ey," which showcases Chef Debra Scott's Asian fusion cuisine and her passion for barbecue, and "Patty Melt," which offers more of a classic menu. Other trucks are entrepreneurial ventures, in some cases operated by budding restaurateurs and chefs who cannot quite afford to open a brick and mortar location, like the popular Kal-Bi-Q food truck.

When it comes to food safety, it should not matter what type of location consumers choose to patronize, be it a stationary eatery or a restaurant on wheels. In all cases, customers need to know that the food they order is stored, prepared and presented in a manner that assures public health.

San Diego County already requires the 1,100 mobile food operations to submit to inspections on a routine basis. We monitor for compliance with state and local laws to ensure the highest level of food safety and conduct routine inspections. It only makes sense to take the next step of assigning an inspection-report based letter grade to the more than 550 mobile food facilities that

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prepare food and are now operating, and those that will operate in the future, throughout the county. Extending the grading program will better inform the public and level the playing field for all food related businesses.

Most San Diegans are familiar with the restaurant letter grading system. The County requires all restaurants to post an A, B or C card in the front window. The grade reflects the food safety and sanitation level during the last inspection. An “A” grade means the facility earned a score of 90 to 100 percent and is in satisfactory compliance with state law; a “B” means the facility earned a score of 80 to 89 percent and needs improvement in operations and/or structure; a “C” means the facility earned a score of 79 percent or less and is failing.

Consumer awareness creates a powerful incentive for restaurants to maintain the highest food safety standards. To that end, the County of San Diego informs the public about the inspection results of brick and mortar restaurants through the County’s Web site. The Department of Environmental Health’s Food Facility Inspection Search allows the public to find the most recent routine inspection information for all retail food facilities in San Diego County. If the grading program is extended, search capabilities would be expanded to include the mobile food facilities that are assigned letter grades as well.

Additionally, new technology coming online later this year will enable real time posting of inspection results done in the field. The DEH also will be adding a QR, otherwise known as a Quick Response, onto all grade signs. When a QR code is scanned using a mobile phone camera, the QR application takes the user to a Web site. In the case of restaurant and food truck signage, the scan will take users directly to the DEH Food Facility Inspection Search Web page where they will find the latest inspection results from that particular truck or restaurant. This will speed up and simplify the transfer of important food safety information to the public.

The challenge of monitoring compliance with food trucks is that they are on the move constantly. Those who are not avid social media followers of a particular truck can be hard pressed to locate precisely where an individual truck is at a particular moment in time. Like the above mentioned technology solutions, I have no doubt that our DEH staff, working in collaboration with industry partners, can find an innovative low-cost remedy to keep tabs on these trucks for purposes of random inspections.

This new evolution of restaurants on wheels, specifically those that cook food, should have to adhere to the same policies and procedures, and undergo the same public disclosures, as its stationary counterparts. As such, I am asking for the Board to support me in directing the Chief Administrative Officer to report back to us on the feasibility, timeline and potential fiscal impacts of implementing a letter grading system for mobile food facilities that prepare food.

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Please join me in supporting this action.

Respectfully submitted,

CHAIRMAN RON ROBERTS  
Supervisor, Fourth District

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**          Yes        No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**  
     Yes        No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**  
N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**  
NA

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION  
NUMBER(S):**  
N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** District 4, Board of Supervisors

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):**    N/A

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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