

## OUR NEIGHBORHOOD *LONCHERAS*

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This article is one of the very few written about the contemporary topic of the mobile food industry. It provides a historical overview of the mobile food industry and how an organization such as the Asociación de *Loncheros* L.A. Familia Unida de California arose to defend the rights of food workers. I personally became involved with the *loncheros* as an intern at the UCLA Labor Center. I was familiar with the *loncheras* long before since I had grown up in a neighborhood with one called “La Estrella” that would park a few blocks from my house. Several Angelinos share this same memory this and same history of the *lonchera* being part of our local neighborhoods. Prior to my involvement with the Asociación de *Loncheros* I viewed the *lonchera* as just a truck that provided delicious low cost homemade meals that I enjoyed. However, there were others who opposed the *loncheras*, who wished to eliminate them because they were perceived as magnets for illegal activities, as eye sores and as unfair competitors of brick and mortar restaurants. Although I was supportive through my initial work with the Asociación de *Loncheros* I discovered that my view of the *lonchera* was shortsighted. I simply saw the *lonchera* as a truck that offered great food, but I soon realized there were people who actually depended on these trucks to earn a living. These were workers who like many were trying to survive in LA. They were women and men with limited employment opportunities, who had

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found that by cooking and selling food from a truck they could support their families and even finance their children's education. Through my work with the Asociación, I began to understand that many *loncheros* were the target of unjust regulations and had been victims of police harassment. I began to see they were not only fighting for their right to work in peace but for social justice. I had listened to countless testimonies of workers who had suffered from police harassment and were intimidated police officers who would often say when citing a *lonchero*, "this is my block and I do not want you here, I do not want to see your lunch truck here." This oppressive treatment was one of several interrelated issues in the fight to save the *lonchera*. This movement was also about socioeconomic inequality, anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, and workers' rights. I was able to observe how these issues were connected to one another and it motivated me to dedicate my time to an organization like the Asociación de *Loncheros* that was addressing these problems. It was simply unbearable to witness firsthand the negative impact and unfair laws the mobile food industry was subjected to. This experience definitely transformed me into an individual with a renewed desire to be an active participant in finding solutions to the social problems that plague our working communities and communities of color. It has truly been enlightening to work with the *loncheros*.