

Viewpoint: LA restaurants tried to sell groceries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Why did the city shut them down?

A few Los Angeles restaurants struggling to maintain footing amid the COVID-19 outbreak identified a clever way to generate revenue while still serving the community: Start selling groceries.

The city's public health department promptly shut them down. The reason? The small businesses don't have a "grocery permit."

"It's not really possible for a restaurant to become a grocery store," Dr. Barbara Ferrer, director of Los Angeles County Public Health, said in a briefing [on March 30]. "You cannot just decide you want to sell groceries."

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The restaurants-turned-grocery stores actually provide a rather obvious public health benefit. They are significantly less crowded than traditional grocery stores, which is convenient when considering that every major health organization has advised individuals to maintain a six-foot distance from surrounding passersby.

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"Elderly people in the neighborhood really enjoy coming to Bacari PDR," Robert Kronfli, the co-owner of one such restaurant-turned-grocery store, tells *Reason*. Foremost, "it was a super chill shopping environment," he says, with "only one or two people in there at once." Contrast that with the major chains, which have been overwhelmed with an onslaught of patrons. "They're afraid to go to large supermarkets right now because of the lines and because of the social distancing thing."

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