The Georgia Department of Health’s regulations are pretty complex and extensive. This guide will help you navigate the Food Code.

Commissary aka Base of Operations

If you want to operate a mobile food unit in the State of Georgia, you must do so from a licensed commissary. Only one mobile food business can operate from a single commissary. The commissary has to follow the Food Code and all cooking and servicing of the truck with food, water, ice and supplies must be done at the commissary. The food truck must park at the commissary at the end of the day. Private homes cannot serve as commissaries.

Potentially Hazardous Food (PHF)

The FDA’s definition of PHF includes almost everything under the sun including raw meat, dairy and cooked vegetables. Any food that has been cooked must be kept in the safe range for holding, below 41°F and above 135°F from the time it leaves the commissary to the time it is served. As of now, no county health department allows mobile units to cook on the unit. The GA Food Code does not prohibit cooking on the unit if proper requirements are met, but local health departments have “interpreted” the code as doing so.

Refrigeration

Mobile food units are required to keep items at the same temperature as nonmobile establishments – this will more than likely require you to purchase a refrigerator. Just remember that ice chests are not adequate forms of refrigeration. There are several types of refrigerators, like cold plate, available for mobile units.

Water

Your mobile food unit must have a plumbed and pressurized water system. Both hot and cold water are required for hand washing. You also have to have a three compartment-ed sink for washing dishes and utensils as well as a separate hand-washing sink. There is no specified minimum capacity for the water supply but the more water you can carry the better off you’ll be. At least 5 gallons should be devoted to handwashing.

The unit must also have a waste water tank which has a capacity at least 15% larger than your potable water tank. The connections for both tanks must be different so as to prevent contamination. The waste water tank must be lower in the mobile unit than the potable water inlet. The waste water must be disposed of according to the Food Code in a sanitary sewer disposal system and in a separate area away from the water servicing area and food servicing area.

Location

Your mobile business is limited to two unique locations per permit. Any change in those locations requires at least 30 days notice to your county’s health department. The penalty for deviating from the two locations may be a revocation of your permit.

Restrooms

There is no apparent regulation regarding the availability of restrooms for mobile food units. However, MFU operators should follow the sanitation procedures for restroom use and hand washing.

Solid Waste/Trash

In Fulton County, MFUs must have 30-gallon trashcans or waste receptacles for patrons and operators. The waste must be disposed of at the base of operations/commissary.

Utensils

All utensils for patrons must be in individually wrapped single-service packages.
Terms You Need to Know!

Base of Operation:
Otherwise known as a commissary, bases of operation are food service establishments (or any other place) in which food, containers or supplies are kept, handled, prepared, packaged or stored for subsequent transport, sale or service elsewhere.

Mobile food service unit:
Also known as a mobile food unit, this can be a trailer, pushcart, vehicle vendor or any other conveyance operating as an extension of a base of operation or a permitted food service establishment/commissary.

Potentially hazardous food:
A potentially hazardous food can be any number of food items that require temperature control because they are capable of supporting:
1. The rapid and progressive growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms.
2. The growth and toxin production of Clostridium botulinum.
3. The growth of Salmonella enteritidis. Potentially hazardous food also include those foods of animal origin that are raw or heat-treated, those foods of plant origin that are heat-treated or consist of raw seed sprouts, cut melons, and garlic-in-oil mixtures that are not modified in a way that results in mixtures that do not support the growth of the bacteria mentioned above.

Servicing area:
These are operating base locations to which a mobile food service unit (mobile food unit) returns at least once daily for such things as vehicle and equipment cleaning, discharging liquid or solid wastes, refilling water tanks and ice bins, and boarding foods.

Important Local Rules & Laws

Atlanta
The City of Atlanta limits vending to two locations for a period not to exceed 30 minutes. Idling of trucks on city streets for longer than 15 minutes is prohibited. Vehicles that carry propane gas cannot park within 200 feet of any building used for gathering or institutional and residential occupancy.

Sandy Springs
Vehicles wider than 8 feet or taller than 10 feet cannot park on a public street without the driver being present.

Roswell
Approval from the zoning director to use parking lots for an accessory use required. The use cannot continue for longer than ten days and is limited to three times per year. The use must be movable and is subject to removal by the zoning director.

DeKalb County
The Department of Permitting – which is under the auspice of Planning and Development – issues permits for businesses and they must pass fire inspection. We were able to find a few codes that may be the culprit. There is a code that requires commercial kitchen hoods over all stoves where grease vapor may be produced. Another code requires fire suppression systems in all commercial kitchens. Further investigation is needed to confirm the hold up. Vehicles with ½ ton or more capacity cannot park on any public street for longer than 1 hour. Vehicles wider than 8 feet or taller than 10 feet cannot park on public streets unless the driver is present.

Gwinnett County
Parking a vehicle in excess of one-half ton capacity upon any public street or highway for longer than one hour is prohibited. Additionally, no person shall stop a truck or bus with a body more than eight feet wide or ten feet high on any street or public place without the driver being present.