

Environmental Health and Infection Control Food Safety Program Updates

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Food safety oversight at WDGPH extends far beyond restaurants. While restaurants are more publicly visible, a substantial proportion of inspection, education and response work occurs in non-restaurant food premises that often operate out of public view.
- In 2025, traditional restaurants accounted for 40% of regulated food premises, with the majority of food facilities falling into a broad and expanding range of non-restaurant settings, including special events, home-based kitchens, shared and community kitchens, small food processors, institutional facilities, retail food operations, breweries with food components, and automated food vending technologies—each with distinct risk profiles requiring tailored oversight.
- Despite operating in more variable and less standardized environments, non-restaurant food premises show comparable—and in some cases lower—rates of complaints and infractions than restaurants. This may reflect effective risk-based inspection strategies, proactive education or in the case of complaints, limited public access.

- Food safety risks are not confined to any single type of premises. Novel foods, innovative preparation methods, and evolving production processes are increasingly found across all food settings, including traditional restaurants, requiring continuous adaptation of inspection and risk assessment practices.
- Public Health Inspectors play a critical and often unseen role in anticipating, assessing, and managing food safety risks across a rapidly evolving food system, reinforcing the importance of a flexible, risk-based, and future-focused inspection model.

Background

Public Health food safety efforts are commonly associated with restaurants; however, a large proportion of food consumed by residents originates from diverse, and often less visible settings. These include temporary food vendors, home-based businesses, shared commercial kitchens, small-scale processors, and emerging automated food technologies. Many of these operations are not readily recognized as part of the regulated food system, yet they fall within public health oversight.

Under the [Ontario Public Health Standards, Food Safety Protocol, 2019](#), health units are required to implement a comprehensive food safety program that includes inspection of all food premises, investigation of complaints, and operator education using a risk-based approach. This mandate applies equally to both restaurant and non-restaurant food settings.

Non-restaurant food premises often operate under conditions that differ from traditional restaurants. These settings can present less visible and more variable risks, requiring tailored inspection approaches and a greater emphasis on education and risk assessment.

In practice, Public Health Inspectors must adapt to a wide range of operating models, extending their work beyond routine inspections to include approvals, assessments, evaluation of novel food processes, complaint response and development of guidance for emerging practices.

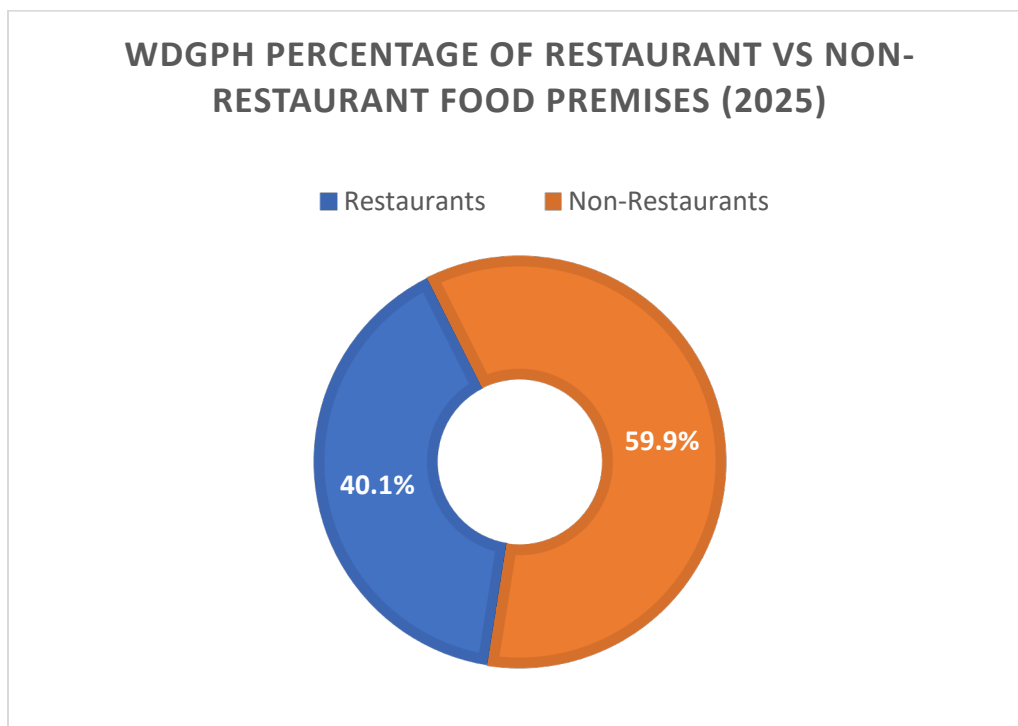
The purpose of this report is to highlight the full scope and complexity of food safety activities conducted by WDGPH, with non-restaurant food premises. By comparing risks, inspection activity, complaints, and infraction patterns across settings, this report highlights the extensive and evolving role of Public Health in protecting community health.

Discussion

Types of Food Premises

In 2025, there were 830 restaurant facilities and 1,241 non-restaurant food premises, with non-restaurant settings representing the larger share of the food environment (Figure 1). While restaurants are the most visible part of the food system, they represent only one portion of where food is prepared, processed, and sold.

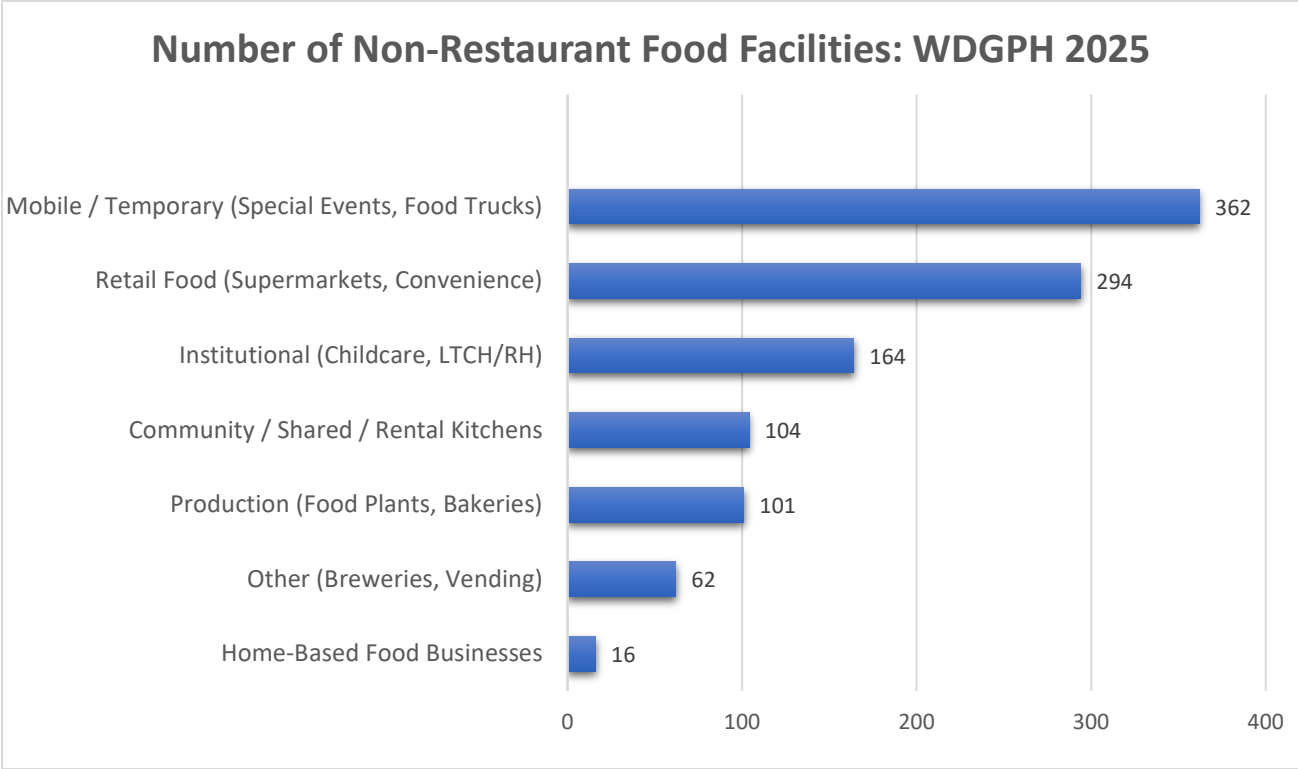
Figure 1: Count of restaurant (830) and non-restaurant (1,241) Facilities for 2025. Data retrieved from Environmental Health team, WDGPH



Traditional restaurants provide a useful benchmark: they typically operate in purpose-built kitchens with established workflows, consistent hours, and predictable food handling processes. In contrast, many non-restaurant premises operate under less standardized and more dynamic conditions, where infrastructure, operating models, and risk factors can vary significantly.

In 2025, PHIs engaged with a wide range of non-restaurant settings, each with distinct operational characteristics and risks, further illustrating the breadth and complexity of the food safety program (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of Facilities Across Non-Restaurant Food Premise Categories for 2025. Data retrieved from Environmental Health team, WDGPH. Refer to Appendix A for a further breakdown of each main category presented in the graph.



Descriptions of Non-Restaurant Food Premises

Mobile and Temporary Venues

Special Events (festivals, fairs, fundraisers, and pop-up vendors) are temporary venues that represent one of the most resource-intensive inspection streams due to their scale and variability. In 2025, WDGPH processed 171 special event approvals, including 29 higher-risk events requiring on-site inspections, resulting in 407 vendor inspections, in addition to several hundred vendors assessed remotely. Special events and temporary food vendors, including mobile food premises (food trucks) often present elevated environmental and logistical challenges. As a result, food safety oversight relies heavily on pre-event risk assessment, operator education, planning and approval, and targeted inspection of critical control points, rather than routine infrastructure-based inspection.

In addition, there are twelve farmers markets and local food vendors operating in WDGPH. These settings involve direct-to-consumer food sales, often in seasonal or outdoor environments with limited infrastructure. Food may be raw or ready-to-eat, and is often

transported and displayed for extended periods, requiring careful handling. Unlike restaurants, these operations typically use portable equipment and variable setups, so inspectors must assess how food safety is maintained under changing conditions.

Retail Food Settings

Retail food premises include supermarkets, grocery stores and convenience stores. There was a total of 294 retail settings in WDGPH in 2025. While often perceived as lower risk, many retail settings now operate multiple food activities under one roof, significantly increasing food safety complexity and inspection demands. This convergence blurs traditional regulatory categories and requires inspectors to assess multiple risk profiles and operating models within a single inspection.

Institutional Food Settings (Hospitals, Long-Term Care, Child Care)

Institutional settings prepare food for populations that are more vulnerable to foodborne illness. While these environments are typically well-structured, the consequences of food safety failures are significantly higher. 164 institutional food settings operated in WDG during 2025.

Community / Shared Kitchens

42 community or shared commercial kitchens operated in WDGPH in 2025. Community kitchens often operate out of religious institutions and are used primarily for the congregation but may also serve external populations or rent out kitchen space for commercial operations which are subject to public health oversight.

Shared Commercial Kitchens (Rented Kitchens)

These are facilities where multiple food businesses operate within the same space, often using shared equipment and infrastructure. These kitchens support small and emerging businesses by providing access to compliant facilities, but they also introduce added complexity due to the number of operators and variety of food activities occurring within a single environment.

Inspections in these settings focus on both individual operator practices and the overall kitchen management model, recognizing that food safety outcomes depend on how the space is coordinated and maintained collectively. Inspections focus on both individual operators and the overall kitchen management model.

To support safe operation in this growing sector, WDG Public Health has undertaken internal awareness-building and education with PHIs and developed guidance for operators, including the [Shared Commercial Kitchen Owner's Guide](#), to promote consistent and effective risk management.

Food Production Facilities

144 small food processors operate within WDGPH. Small processors, including bakeries and specialty food producers, produce food in batches and often distribute food beyond a single location. This increases the potential impact if issues arise and requires more structured process control than typical restaurant operations.

Food processors that ship products outside provincial boundaries, or import or export food, are regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ([CFIA](#)) under federal legislation. Food processors operating solely within Ontario may be regulated by a combination of provincial oversight (including Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) for certain commodity-specific processing activities) and local public health units, depending on the type of food produced and the nature of the operation.

Other Food Facilities

'Other Food Facilities' represent a wide range of non-restaurant facility types. Only selected types have been highlighted in detail in this report (immediately below). Refer to the appendix for a full list of food premises 'types.

Breweries with Food Components

Breweries when operated in combination with a bar or restaurant (Brew Pub) combine beverage production with food components in spaces not originally designed for food preparation. Eleven such premises operated in WDG in 2025. Although considered lower in risk, brewery operations still present potential hazards related to broken glass and pest control. These hazards can impact the beverage itself or migrate into the food portion of the establishment. These risks are managed through targeted inspection practices and operator education.

Robotic and Automated Food Vending Machines

Emerging food technologies dispensing ready-to-eat food introduce new operational models rather than new foods. While these systems may reduce some human-handling risks, they introduce new points of system-based risk, requiring adapted inspection approaches. An approval risk assessment tool and guidance documents were created to help address the risks.

Designated Emergency Shelters

Emergency shelters are not routinely inspected by public health unless they also operate as an inspected kitchen such as those found in community centers. Once designated by a municipality as an emergency shelter, the municipality works with public health to arrange an inspection and to receive general advice and recommendations related to other public health considerations such as Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and Infectious Disease measures.

Non-Food Processing or Service Facilities

Food premises are supported by a variety of businesses such as laundry facilities (to launder linens) and ware-washing facilities. These facilities are not typically inspected nor regulated by food safety agencies yet still present a potential food safety risk within the food premises inspected by WDGPH. As such, WDGPH will inspect these facilities when a potential health hazard has been identified via complaints or direct observation by a PHI.

Home-based Kitchens

Home-based food businesses operate within private residences that are not designed for commercial food production and high volume. There are 16 such establishments known to and inspected by WDGPH although there are many others believed to be operating but not having notified WDGPH. These home-based businesses may rely on portable equipment and variable setups. Food preparation and ingredient storage may occur alongside incompatible household activities, requiring inspectors to assess how safe practices are maintained in shared spaces.

Food Safety Activity in Non-Restaurant Settings

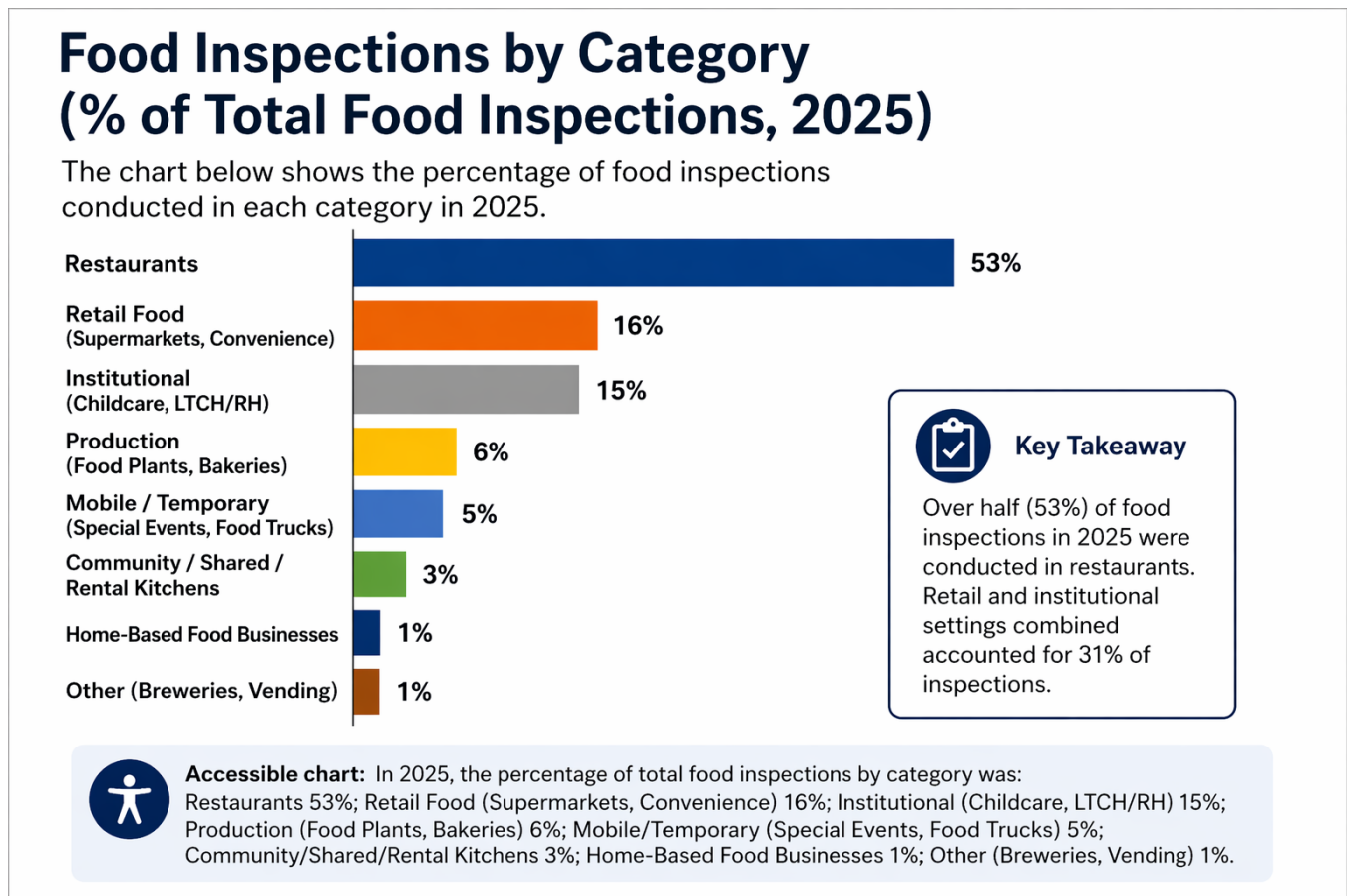
Public Health food safety activities typically involve inspection, education and enforcement. For the purpose of this report, we present a comparison in inspection activities between traditional restaurants and non-restaurant settings in the areas of: (1) Inspection; (2) Complaint Investigation; (3) Responses to requests for support or information.

Inspection Activity by Premises Type

4,447 inspections (including re-inspections) were conducted in 2025 of all food premises. Of those, 2348 (53%) occurred in restaurants and 2099 (47%) occurred in non-restaurant food premises. Figure 3 shows the distribution of inspections among the food premises categories used in this report.

53% of inspection activity focused on 40.1% of food premises (i.e. restaurants), reflects the higher risk rating generally placed on restaurants compared to non-restaurant settings. Settings with a higher risk rating require more inspections annually. Nonetheless, this distribution demonstrates that a substantial proportion of PHI inspection effort is placed outside of restaurant environments.

Figure 4: Distribution of Inspection Across Non-Restaurant Food Premise Categories for 2025. Data retrieved from Environmental Health team, WDGPH



Complaint Activity by Premise Type

Food safety complaints provide insight into both public concern and potential risk across different types of food premises.

2025 Food Safety Complaint Overview			
Premise Type	% of Facilities	% of Complaint	Complaints per 100 Facilities
Restaurants	40%	69%	34
Non-Restaurants	60%	31%	10

In 2025, WDGPH received 281 complaints related to restaurants (69% of all food complaints) and 126 complaints related to non-restaurants (31% of all food complaints).

When adjusted for the number of facilities, complaint rates in non-restaurant settings were lower than those observed in restaurants (10 complaints per 100 facilities vs 34 complaints per 100 facilities).

This suggests that, despite operating in more variable and less standardized environments, non-restaurant food premises are not generating higher levels of reported concern. The higher complaint rate in restaurants likely reflects their greater visibility and more frequent interaction with the public, rather than a concentration of food safety risk.

Requests for Support or Information Activity by Premise Type

Requests for support or information reflect the sort of food safety guidance, resources or support food operators and members of the public are seeking from Public Health.

2025 Food Safety Request for Information (RFI) Overview			
Premise Type	% of Facilities	% of RFI	RFI per 100 Facilities
Restaurants	40%	37%	5
Non-Restaurants	60%	63%	5

In 2025, 39 requests for information were associated with traditional restaurants and 67 requests for information were associated with non-restaurant food premises

When adjusted for the number of facilities, request rates were similar across both settings (approximately 5 vs 5 requests per 100 facilities).

Food Safety Compliance in Non-Restaurant Settings

Infractions

2025 Food Safety Infraction Overview		
Premise Type	% of Facilities	% of Infractions
Restaurants	40%	72%
Non-Restaurants	60%	28%

In 2025, a total of 2,839 infractions were cited across all food premises. Of those, 2,041 (72%) were attributed to restaurants and 798 (28%) were attributed to non-restaurant settings. The greater number of infractions cited in restaurants is likely related to the higher number of

inspections conducted (2,348/53% vs 2,099/47% for non-restaurants). In addition, food handling processes tend to be more complex in restaurants, and thus more areas are subject to being potentially non-compliant.

The most common infraction types were similar across premises categories and typically related to:

- Temperature control
- Sanitation
- Food handling practices

Notably, non-restaurant food premises did not demonstrate disproportionately higher infraction rates despite operating in less conventional environments.

Health Equity Considerations

Non-restaurant food premises often include small, emerging, or community-based operators. WDGPH's approach emphasizes:

- Education-first compliance
- Accessible training and certification
- Clear guidance for operators navigating regulatory requirements

These efforts support equitable participation in the food economy while maintaining protections for consumers.

The introduction of no-charge food handler certification exams and expanded community-based training improves access for individuals who may face financial or logistical obstacles. This supports youth entering the workforce and ensures a baseline of food safety knowledge across diverse communities.

WDG Public Health also supports small and emerging food businesses, including those using shared kitchens and conducting novel food operations, by providing tailored resources and guidance. These efforts help reduce compliance challenges that can disproportionately affect operators with limited capital or regulatory familiarity.

The increase in public complaints and inquiries (NEXUS) reflects growing community engagement. Accessible complaint mechanisms empower all residents to participate in food safety oversight, which is particularly valuable in underserved or higher-risk areas.

Conclusion

This report illustrates the full scope and complexity of Food Safety Program activities undertaken by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. While restaurants remain the most visible component of the regulated food system, they represent only a portion of the environments in which food is prepared, processed, and sold within the community.

Non-restaurant food premises comprise the majority of food facilities under WDGPH oversight and include a wide range of operating models, from temporary and mobile vendors to retail, institutional, production, and emerging automated food settings. These environments often operate under more variable conditions and evolving business models, requiring tailored inspection approaches and a strong emphasis on risk assessment, education, and adaptive oversight.

The comparative analysis presented in this report demonstrates that, despite their diversity and complexity, non-restaurant food premises generally perform on par with traditional restaurants with respect to complaint volume and regulatory compliance. This finding reflects the effectiveness of Public Health Inspectors' risk-based inspection strategies and the value of proactive education and guidance for operators across all food sectors.

As food systems continue to evolve—through new technologies, changing consumer expectations, and increasingly blended models of food preparation and sale—a flexible, risk-based public health approach remains essential. Ongoing oversight across both restaurant and non-restaurant settings is critical to ensuring food safety and protecting the health of residents, regardless of where or how food is produced and consumed.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- Improve health outcomes
- Focus on children's health
- Build strong partnerships
- Innovate our programs and services
- Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. [Ontario. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards, 2019. \[Internet\]. 2019 \[cited 2025 Jan 14\]. Available from: \[Food Safety Protocol, 2019 \\(gov.on.ca\\)\]\(https://www.ontario.ca/gov\)](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: Food Facility Types

The following is a comprehensive list of food facility types as classified within WDGPH's inspection software (Hedgehog):

- Bakery
- Banquet Hall
- Bed and Breakfast
- Butcher Shop
- Cafeteria
- Catering Vehicle
- Child Care Kitchen
- Cocktail Bar
- Community Kitchen
- Convenience / Variety Store
- Farmers' Market
- Farmers' Market (O. Reg. 493/17 Exempt)
- Food Bank
- Food Caterer
- Food Plant – Production
- Food Take Out
- Food Warehouse / Depot
- Group / Lodging Home
- Hospital Food Services
- Hot Dog Cart
- Long-Term Care Facility
- Mobile Preparation Premises
- Not Inspected – Canteen / Not Inspected – Food Premises
- Religious Organization Banquet Facility
- Restaurant
- Retirement Home
- Serving Kitchen
- Shelter
- Special Event / Fair Coordinator / Special Event Vendor
- Supermarket