

BEYOND THE COMMERCIAL STRIP: INFORMAL FOOD VENDORS IN GADING SERPONG'S PERI-URBAN LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of modern commercial areas in peri-urban environments has created increasingly diverse food and beverage (F&B) landscapes in these areas. Alongside formal restaurants, cafés, and commercial food outlets, informal F&B vendors continue to operate within everyday spaces and provide alternative food and beverage options. This preliminary study aims to provide an initial description of how informal F&B vendors manifest in Gading Serpong and examine their role in providing accessible food and beverage options for people conducting daily activities in the area. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, based primarily on field observations, supported by visual documentation and relevant online information. The observations focused on vendor types, operational locations, mobility, operating patterns, products, and service characteristics of the vendors. The findings indicate that informal F&B activities take various forms, including temporary food stalls, pushcarts, bicycle vendors, mobile beverage vendors, and small, temporary booths. Rather than being concentrated in a single culinary destination, these vendors are dispersed across everyday activity spaces, such as residential areas, roadsides, workplaces, schools, commercial surroundings, and settlement access points. Their service characteristics emphasize proximity, flexibility, convenience, and relatively affordable everyday food and beverage options for consumers. Comparison with established culinary areas such as Pasar Lama Tangerang and Blok M suggests that informal F&B in Gading Serpong has a more activity-oriented role than a destination-oriented role. This study provides an initial perspective on how informal F&B contributes to the diversity and evolving character of peri-urban F&B landscapes.

Keywords: street vendors, peri-urban landscape, food accessibility, Gading Serpong

INTRODUCTION

Gading Serpong has emerged as a significant private new-town area in Tangerang Regency, marked by its organized residential projects, commercial zones, educational facilities, office spaces, and a swiftly growing food and beverage (F&B) industry. The region is increasingly linked with formal commercial venues, including restaurants, cafés, shopping malls, and food courts (Hidayat & Setiawan, 2024; Martha & Setiawan, 2026). This growth mirrors the wider changes in peri-urban Tangerang, where extensive private developments have established new hubs of economic activity alongside existing neighborhoods and communities. Earlier studies have characterized Gading Serpong as a suburban new-town setting where planned developments coexist with older, unplanned areas, fostering economic

interactions between the new town and its neighboring communities (Kresna et al., 2024; Muludi et al., 2026).

Amid this highly visible formal F&B landscape, another layer of food and beverage activity can be observed outside the commercial establishments formally provided by the property developers. Warung tenda, temporary food stalls, pushcarts, bicycle vendors, mobile beverage sellers, and other small-scale vendors operate along roads, near residential areas, around educational facilities, beside commercial clusters, and at the edges of existing activity centers. The initial mapping conducted for this study identified several forms of informal F&B vendors, ranging from semi-permanent stalls and daily dismantled tents to mobile bicycle and cart vendors. These businesses do not necessarily compete through conventional restaurant facilities or dining environments; instead, they operate through small-scale, flexible, and highly accessible services (Yulius et al., 2025).

The presence of such vendors is not necessarily a recent consequence of Gading Serpong's rapid commercial growth. Earlier studies of the area have documented informal economic activities associated with settlements embedded within or adjacent to the new-town development. In Kampung Rumpak Sinang, for example, research conducted around 2020 identified food and beverage street vendors operating along the kampung's entrance corridor, with customers including online motorcycle taxi drivers, workers in Gading Serpong, and local residents (Kurniawan & Tarigan, 2021). Other research on street vendors in the Gading Serpong real-estate area has also shown that informal vendors have developed social networks and mechanisms for maintaining access to selling spaces in a rapidly changing urban environment. These observations suggest that informal F&B activities should not simply be viewed as temporary responses to recent developments but as an existing component of the area's everyday economic landscape.

Simultaneously, the forms of informal F&B services found in Gading Serpong are diverse. Some vendors remain at relatively fixed locations, such as warung tenda or small roadside stalls, whereas others move between locations according to the flow of potential customers. Bicycle-based coffee vendors, commonly referred to as *Starling*, provide a particularly visible example of this mobile food and beverage service. A recent study specifically examining Starling vendors in Gading Serpong found that these vendors operate as ultra-micro businesses that rely on mobility, customer proximity, flexible working hours, and adaptation to their environment (Yulius et al., 2025). Bicycle coffee vendors and mobile beverage sellers are increasingly visible around Gading Serpong's commercial and everyday activity areas, adding variety and flexibility to the informal F&B landscape while reaching customers across different spaces.

From a food-service perspective, the coexistence of informal vendors and formal F&B establishments creates an additional layer in Gading Serpong's competitive landscape. Informal vendors may offer considerably simpler facilities than restaurants and cafés, but their proximity to everyday activities provides a different form of value. They can operate close to workplaces, schools, residential access points, kampung corridors, construction areas, and routes used by commuters and motorcycle riders. In some locations, temporary stalls also appear during particular periods of the day, particularly around lunch or evening (Dania, 2026). Existing observations in Gading Serpong illustrate how food vendors can occupy the edges of formal commercial areas and kampung corridors, allowing them to serve people who may seek quick, familiar, and relatively affordable food and beverages without entering a formal restaurant.

Despite the visibility of restaurants, cafés, and other formal F&B businesses in Gading Serpong, informal vendors operating around them remain relatively less discussed as part of

the area's food-service landscape. This study therefore asks: How are informal food and beverage vendors manifested within the everyday activity spaces of Gading Serpong, and what role do they play in providing accessible food and beverage options for people who conduct their daily activities in the area? Using a qualitative descriptive approach based primarily on field observation and supported by publicly available online information, this study aims to provide a preliminary description of informal F&B vendors in Gading Serpong and highlight their presence as an additional layer of the area's evolving food and beverage landscape. Rather than evaluating their economic performance or attempting to measure consumer income, this study focuses on describing the visible forms, locations, and service characteristics of these vendors within the peri-urban environment of Gading Serpong.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peri-Urban Landscape

Peri-urban areas are spaces located between established urban areas and surrounding suburban or rural environments, where urban development, residential expansion, commercial activities, and existing settlements often coexist (Sahana et al., 2023; Yang & Ye, 2020). These areas are characterized by continuous transformation and a mixture of planned and unplanned spatial patterns of development (Colleoni, 2019; Li et al., 2023; Simon, 2025). In the context of Tangerang, the rapid development of new-town areas has created modern commercial and residential environments while also maintaining connections with pre-existing settlements and local economic activities (Ischak et al., 2017; Karenina et al., 2026).

Therefore, the peri-urban landscape should not be understood only through formal buildings and planned commercial spaces (Gottero et al., 2021). Everyday economic activities may also emerge in transitional spaces, roadside areas, settlement entrances, and spaces surrounding formal development (Cebir Meral & Özsoy, 2021; Kamalipour, 2022). This creates a diverse urban environment in which different forms of economic activity operate in parallel.

Informal Food and Beverage Economy

The informal food and beverage economy consists of food and drink businesses that generally operate with relatively simple facilities, flexible locations, limited capital, and less formalized business arrangements than formal businesses (Bowen, 2023; Farah et al., 2022). Examples include street food stalls, temporary tents, pushcarts, small roadside vendors, and other small-scale food and beverage vendors (Briliana et al., 2023; Witasari, 2023). Their operations can be relatively flexible compared to businesses operating in permanent commercial premises (Bouafou et al., 2021).

Informal F&B vendors provide everyday food and beverage options that are often characterized by accessibility, simplicity, and affordability (Kowalczyk, 2020; Mando, 2021). Their presence is closely connected to the daily movement of people, including workers, students, residents, commuters, and others conducting activities in urban and peri-urban areas (Roever & Skinner, 2016). Consequently, informal F&B activities can become an important part of the everyday food environment beyond formal restaurants and commercial establishments.

Mobile and Itinerant Food Vendors

Mobile and itinerant food vendors are informal F&B providers whose operations are

not necessarily tied to a permanent location (Reznar et al., 2019). They may use bicycles, pushcarts, motorcycles, or other mobile means to move between activity areas. Their locations and operating hours can change according to pedestrian movement, customer concentration, working hours, and other situational factors (Aulia et al., 2018; Dawood et al., 2010). Mobility allows these vendors to bring food and beverages closer to potential customers rather than depending entirely on customers visiting a fixed establishment (Wessel, 2024). This form of service is particularly relevant in areas with changing daily activity patterns. Mobile vendors can therefore function as a flexible layer of F&B provision that follows the spatial and temporal rhythms of people using the area (Lucan et al., 2014; Qardawi et al., 2025).

Coexistence of Formal and Informal F&B Services

Formal and informal F&B services can coexist within the same urban or peri-urban environment, without necessarily serving identical purposes or operating through the same service model (Colozza, 2025; Dsouza, 2023). Formal establishments generally depend on permanent premises, structured facilities, and planned commercial locations, whereas informal vendors tend to rely on flexibility, proximity, mobility, and relatively simple operations (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). Therefore, these two forms can be viewed as different components of a broader F&B landscape.

The coexistence of these forms of F&B activities contributes to the diversity of food and beverage services available in a developing area. Informal vendors may occupy spaces outside major commercial strips, such as near residential access points, workplaces, schools, roadside areas, and other locations where people conduct their daily activities (Putri et al., 2026; Widjajanti et al., 2025). Their presence adds another layer to the F&B landscape and illustrates how food and beverage services can develop through planned commercial development and everyday informal activities.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to provide a simple and contextual description of informal food and beverage vendors operating in peri-urban environments (Furidha, 2024). This study focused on vendors operating outside formal developer-managed commercial spaces, including street food stalls, temporary tents, pushcarts, bicycles, and mobile food and beverage sellers. Data were primarily collected through direct field observations of vendor activities, locations, operating characteristics, products offered, service practices, and their relationships with the surrounding daily activity areas (Dhobi, 2023). Visual documentation was used to support these observations.

The collected information was analyzed descriptively by organizing observations into several themes (Nowell et al., 2017), including vendor type, location, mobility, operating patterns, products and services, accessibility, and the relationship between informal vendors and the surrounding formal food and beverage landscape. Online information and relevant secondary sources were used only as supporting information to provide a contextual understanding of the observed phenomenon. The analysis was not intended to measure vendor performance, consumer income, or causal relationships but rather to present an initial description of how informal F&B vendors form an additional layer of food and beverage services within the peri-urban landscape.

RESULTS

Forms and Spatial Distribution of Informal F&B Vendors

Field observations indicate that informal food and beverage activities in Gading Serpong are represented by several different types of vendors, ranging from relatively stationary food stalls to vendors who move between different areas. Rather than operating within permanent commercial premises, these vendors generally utilize roadside spaces, settlement access points, areas surrounding commercial activities, and other locations where people regularly pass and conduct their daily activities. The variation in physical form and mobility also results in differences in the way vendors provide food and beverages to customers. The main types of informal F&B vendors identified in this study are listed in Table

Table 1. Types of Informal F&B Vendors in Gading Serpong

No.	Type of Informal F&B Vendor	General Operational Location	Typical Products
1	Warung Tenda / Temporary Food Stall	Roadside areas, near residential areas, activity corridors, or spaces adjacent to commercial areas	Rice dishes, noodles, fried foods, grilled foods, soups, snacks, and beverages
2	Pushcart / Gerobak Vendor	Sidewalks, roadside areas, residential entrances, and pedestrian or vehicle activity points	Bakso, mie ayam, batagor, siomay, cilok, fried snacks, and other ready-to-eat foods
3	Bicycle Food & Beverage Vendor	Ruko surroundings, residential streets, roadside areas, and areas with concentrated daily activities	Coffee, instant beverages, iced drinks, snacks, and simple ready-to-eat foods
4	Mobile Beverage Vendor / Starling	Roadsides, office surroundings, residential areas, activity corridors, and locations with changing customer concentrations	Bottled and instant drinks, coffee, tea, soft drinks, and other ready-to-drink beverages
5	Small Temporary Booth / Non-Ruko Stall	Small roadside spaces, settlement edges, access points, and spaces outside permanent commercial buildings	Snacks, beverages, breakfast foods, rice dishes, and other affordable everyday foods
6	Night-Time Temporary Food Stall	Roadside spaces and activity areas that become more active in the afternoon or evening	Grilled foods, noodles, rice dishes, satay, fried foods, snacks, and beverages

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026)

The table illustrates that informal F&B vendors operate with different degrees of permanence and mobility. Warung tenda, temporary booths, and some pushcart vendors tend to maintain a relatively stable operational location, although their physical structures remain simpler and more temporary than those of formal F&B establishments. In contrast, bicycle and mobile beverage vendors, such as Starling, can move between locations according to the

concentration of potential customers and the rhythm of daily activities. Night-time temporary stalls represent another form of spatial and temporal flexibility, utilizing locations that may have different levels of activity during the day and night. This variation suggests that informality is manifested not only through the physical appearance of the business but also through the flexibility of where and when F&B services are provided.

The products offered across these vendor types are similarly diverse, covering meals, beverages, snacks, and other ready-to-consume products. Their operational locations are generally connected to everyday activity spaces, including residential access points, roadsides, areas surrounding workplaces and commercial activities, and other locations with the regular movement of people. Consequently, informal vendors become visible as an additional layer of F&B activity outside permanent restaurants, cafés and other formal commercial establishments. Their presence contributes to the variety of food and beverage options available to people conducting their daily activities in the area, while also giving the F&B landscape a more flexible and informal character.

Operating and Service Patterns

The observation also shows that informal F&B vendors in Gading Serpong operate through relatively flexible service patterns. Unlike formal F&B establishments that generally depend on fixed premises and standardized operating hours, informal vendors can adjust their presence according to surrounding activity. Some vendors remain in one location for several hours, whereas mobile vendors move between locations where potential customers are concentrated. This flexibility allows vendors to adapt their operations to the daily movement of people within the area.

Operating hours also vary according to the vendor type and the characteristics of the surrounding activity space. Food stalls may operate during breakfast, lunch, or dinner periods, whereas beverage vendors can appear during different periods of the day. Mobile vendors have greater flexibility in changing their location and timing, allowing them to follow customer activity rather than relying on customers visiting a specific commercial location. Some temporary food stalls are particularly visible in the afternoon and evening when roadside and neighborhood activities increase. In terms of service, most informal vendors emphasize simplicity, accessibility and speed. Food and beverages are generally prepared for immediate consumption or takeaway, with limited seating and supporting facilities compared with those of formal restaurants or cafés. The relatively simple service arrangement also allows vendors to maintain a small operational scale while offering products that can be consumed during work breaks, while commuting, or during other everyday activities. For mobile vendors, the service process is even more directly connected to customer proximity because the vendor can approach or position themselves close to potential customers. The observed operating patterns demonstrate that flexibility is an important characteristic of informal F&B services. The combination of variable locations, adaptable operating times, mobile operations, and simple service arrangements enables these vendors to respond to changing patterns of activity in the area. Rather than competing with formal F&B establishments through similar facilities or dining experiences, informal vendors provide a different mode of service, primarily based on proximity and convenience.

Accessibility and Everyday Food Provision

The presence of informal F&B vendors provides additional food and beverage options for people conducting their daily activities in Gading Serpong. Their locations are generally close to places where people live, work, study, commute, or carry out other activities. Because they operate outside permanent commercial premises, customers can access these vendors

without entering shopping centers, restaurants, cafés, or other formal F&B establishments. This proximity makes informal vendors particularly visible in the everyday activity spaces of the area.

Accessibility is also reflected in the relatively simple purchasing processes. Customers can usually purchase food or beverages directly from the vendor with limited waiting time and without the need for a formal dining environment. For people who are working, commuting, or taking short breaks, this type of service provides a practical option for obtaining meals, snacks, or beverages during their daily routines. Mobile vendors further extend this accessibility by changing their locations according to customer activities and the surrounding environment.

The observed vendors also provided a broad range of everyday products, from simple meals and snacks to coffee and ready-to-drink beverages. This variety indicates that informal F&B services are not limited to a particular consumption occasion. They can accommodate different everyday needs, such as breakfast, lunch, refreshments, snacks, and evening meals. The relatively affordable and uncomplicated nature of many of these products also makes them accessible to consumers who may prefer to manage their everyday food expenditure without necessarily choosing a formal dining establishment to eat.

Overall, informal F&B vendors can be understood as an additional layer of everyday food provision in the evolving F&B landscape. Their role is not necessarily to replace formal restaurants or cafés but to complement the existing range of F&B choices through proximity, convenience, flexibility, and accessibility. Their continued presence demonstrates that the development of a modern peri-urban commercial environment can coexist with simpler and more informal forms of food and beverage service, adding another dimension to the competitive and spatial landscape of F&B activities in the region.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that informal F&B vendors in Gading Serpong should not be understood the same way as established street food destinations in Jabodetabek. Although all three environments contain relatively informal or small-scale food businesses, their spatial roles, relationships with consumers, and relationships with the surrounding urban environment differ. A comparison with Pasar Lama Tangerang and the Blok M area is useful because both are widely recognized as culinary-oriented urban areas that have developed into more concentrated destinations for food consumption. Pasar Lama, for example, functions as a culinary center along the Kota Lama area, with vendors, tenants, and restaurants concentrated within the same culinary environment (Tannuwijaya et al., 2025; Vinata & Puspawati, 2025). Blok M similarly contains established street-food clusters, including Gultik, which has operated in the area since the 1980s, as well as more recent culinary spaces such as the Pasaraya Blok M area (Fajariana & Untari, 2019; Muzhaffar & Wijaya, 2024; Pratama & Manggabarani, 2026).

Table 2. Informal F&B Vendors in Different Urban Culinary Environments

Aspect	Gading Serpong	Pasar Lama Tangerang	Blok M, Jakarta
Primary spatial character	Dispersed across everyday activity spaces	Concentrated culinary corridor/destination	Clustered and distributed within a major urban commercial area
Main purpose of the space	Everyday food and beverage provision	Culinary destination, shopping, and leisure	Culinary, leisure, shopping, and urban

Aspect	Gading Serpong	Pasar Lama Tangerang	Blok M, Jakarta
Relationship with customers	Primarily serves people already conducting activities nearby	Customers may intentionally visit the area for food	social activities Customers may intentionally visit for food, leisure, shopping, or nightlife
Vendor mobility	Relatively high; includes carts, bicycles, and mobile beverage vendors	Combination of fixed stalls, carts, tenants, and seasonal vendors	Combination of fixed street-food vendors, stalls, kiosks, and restaurants
Relationship with formal F&B	Often operates outside formal commercial premises and around their activity spaces	Informal vendors coexist with tenants, restaurants, and established shops	Informal/street-food businesses coexist with formal commercial and retail establishments
Role of location	Location follows everyday activity and customer proximity	Location itself is part of the culinary attraction	Location is part of a recognized urban destination
Consumption pattern	Convenience, everyday meals, snacks, and beverages	Culinary exploration, socializing, and everyday consumption	Culinary exploration, socializing, leisure, and everyday consumption
Identity of the area	Informal F&B as an additional layer within a developing peri-urban landscape	Established culinary identity	Established urban culinary and entertainment identity
Spatial scale of F&B activity	Relatively scattered and localized	Concentrated	Concentrated in several recognizable culinary clusters
Main distinguishing feature	Proximity to everyday activity	Culinary destination	Urban culinary and social destination

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026)

Pasar Lama provides a useful comparison because informal and small-scale F&B vendors are closely associated with established culinary destinations. Vendors, carts, tenants, and restaurants operate within a relatively concentrated area, making the food environment itself an attraction. Similarly, Blok M contains recognizable culinary clusters, such as Gultik, alongside newer food spaces that combine food stalls with seating and social activities. In both areas, people may intentionally visit locations for culinary exploration, leisure, and social activities, indicating that informal F&B has become connected to the destination's identity.

In contrast, the findings in Gading Serpong indicate a more dispersed and activity-oriented

form of informal F&B provision. Vendors are generally found within everyday activity spaces, such as residential areas, workplaces, schools, roadsides, commercial surroundings, and settlement access points, rather than being concentrated in a single culinary destination. Some vendors maintain relatively fixed locations, whereas others use mobile operations to follow customer activity. Therefore, their role is primarily connected to proximity, convenience, and accessibility, providing food and beverages to people who are already engaged in their daily activities in the area.

This comparison suggests a distinction between destination-oriented and activity-oriented informal F&B. In Pasar Lama and Blok M, informal F&B contributes to a recognizable culinary identity that can attract people to the area. In Gading Serpong, informal vendors function as an embedded everyday service layer alongside the formal commercial landscape. Their presence does not necessarily create a centralized culinary destination but adds flexibility and variety to F&B provisions by bringing relatively simple and accessible food and beverages closer to the everyday flows of people within the peri-urban environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This preliminary study provides an initial description of informal food and beverage vendors as an additional layer of the F&B landscape in Gading Serpong's peri-urban environment. The observed vendors appear in various forms, including temporary food stalls, pushcarts, bicycle vendors, mobile beverage vendors, and small temporary booths, operating within everyday spaces rather than formal commercial premises. Their presence suggests that informal F&B services provide accessible, convenient, and relatively affordable food and beverage options for people who live, work, study, commute, or engage in other daily activities in the area. In this context, informal F&B represents an activity-oriented form of food provision that exists alongside the formal commercial F&B sectors.

The comparison with Pasar Lama Tangerang and Blok M also suggests that informal F&B can take on different spatial roles within urban environments. While informal vendors in established culinary destinations are more closely associated with concentrated culinary identities and destination-oriented consumption, the vendors observed in Gading Serpong are more dispersed and connected to the everyday patterns of movement and activity. This preliminary observation indicates that the development of a modern peri-urban commercial environment does not necessarily eliminate informal F&B activity; instead, different forms of F&B services can coexist within the changing landscape.

As a preliminary descriptive study, these findings provide a basis for further investigation rather than a comprehensive representation of the entire informal F&B ecosystem in Singapore. Future research could extend the observations to more locations, different days and operating periods, and a larger variety of vendors. Further studies may also explore customer profiles, perceptions of accessibility and affordability, vendor motivations, business sustainability, and interactions between informal and formal F&B businesses to develop a deeper understanding of informal F&B activities in peri-urban areas.

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