

Moises Lemus & Juan Leon
El Agave – Oxford, MS

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Date: August 3, 2017

Location: El Agave

Interviewer: Simone Delorme

Transcription: Technitype Transcripts

Length: Forty-four minutes

Project: Latino Memphis & Oxford

Delerme: This is Simone Delerme, and I'm within the Southern Foodways Alliance, and today is August the 3rd [2017], and we're here at El Agave to learn a little bit more about the restaurant and, more importantly, about the stories behind the food.

So to start, if you would just introduce yourselves, say your name, and tell us a little bit about the restaurant, when you opened it, for instance, how long you've been here.

[0:00:27.8]

Lemus: Okay. My name is Moises, and I'm one of the partners here at El Agave. This location we opened last year in October, and with El Agave brand, we started in New Albany—2012?

[0:00:43.4]

Leon: Yeah.

[0:00:44.0]

Lemus: So, yeah, in 2012, and this brand originated—the El Agave brand originated in New Albany, and this is the second location.

[0:00:53.3]

Delerme: Okay. This is the second location. Do you have plans for expanding further?

[0:00:57.1]

Lemus: It's hard to say. If we see the right opportunity, maybe. Are we looking for it or pushing for it at the moment? Not really. We're just kind of focused at this location right now.

[0:01:11.2]

Delerme: What made you first start in New Albany? Why New Albany?

[0:01:14.6]

Lemus: Why New Albany? Well [chuckles], one is I was finishing college that year, and Juan actually called me, and he knew about this building that was already set up as a restaurant, and it was just the perfect opportunity. I lived in New Albany, so I knew the town, you know. I went to high school there, you know. I knew the people there, so it was kind of like going back home. So it was like a perfect opportunity for me, and me and him had some history together, so we always kept it in mind. I always kept, like, an open door, hey, maybe one day we can work on something together.

[0:01:55.0]

Delerme: And why Oxford for the expansion?

[0:02:05.4]

Lemus: To me personally, Oxford was always an attraction. For any business, it's an attractive location, just because, yeah, the students, but, I mean, to me, it was not just the students. There's a lot of growth in Oxford, you know. Growth is always going to bring

more opportunities, you know. Plus, we believe in our brand. We always try to push—you know, I always try to look at this way and try to push, hey, we can be better than our competitive market. I don't know if you want to say something about why Oxford.

[0:02:38.6]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:02:56.2]

Delerme: Can you tell us a little bit about the food that's served here? What type of Mexican food? What are some of the items on the menu, for instance?

[0:03:02.4]

Lemus: All right. Our menu's kind of—to be honest with you, it's larger than what we really want it to be, but we kind of took it to two extremes, because what we did in Agave, we kind of evolved the market that was, you know, the Mexican restaurants in South Mississippi, and then we made another push to blend in what flavors people like around here. For example, I believe he's got more history on the Mexican restaurants than I do, obviously, but I think back in the day, I don't think any of the Mexican restaurants used bacon, for example. Right? So, you know, we have a plate, it's shrimp, bacon over rice with cheese dip. You know, a lot of people didn't think, "Hey, let's add bacon to—and put it on the menu," but we did because we knew what people—you know, you have to read your consumers, see what they want. It's kind of like any other

market, where they really start liking the touchscreens, so, hey, they focus on that, and it shows growth.

We added barbecue sauce. We have barbecue—there's a couple plates that have barbecue sauce. So, you know, it's like knowing how to blend in and knowing what the customers want, what kind of flavors, you know. It was—what is it? We have a P5, which P5 is like a—

[0:04:20.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:04:34.0]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:04:34.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:04:44.4]

Lemus: So that's one point. That was one extreme. We adjusted to what people want, and then we also kept it authentic. We have the street tacos is what we call them, and those are the authentic tacos that you're going to find in Mexico. If you go to Mexico and order a taco, you know, a lot of people think, "Oh, Taco Bell," you know. It's nothing like that. And Oxford's really good about—the people knew about the authentic food because you have a lot of folks from Texas. You have a lot of folks from outside of

Mississippi, so, you know, they are looking for that, so, in a way, it's worked both ways for us. We accommodate to the customers from Mississippi and this area and what they like or whatever they think of Mexican food is. Well, it's not only that. It's, you know, somebody that moved from Texas or even another country, when they say "Mexican food," what comes into their mind, you know? So we kind of play around back and forth with it, and we just adjust it as we go.

[0:05:42.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:05:57.7]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:05:58.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:06:00.2]

Lemus: In New Albany, when we opened El Agave in New Albany, I don't think anybody from North Mississippi, not a single Mexican restaurant, would offer the fresh guacamole. So I think we were the first ones, if I remember correctly. I'm not trying to say I claim it, but we did our research. And it's a risk, you know, because you do all these materials and employees. But after it was a success, all the surrounding restaurants, "Oh, they're doing that." Or even the customers say, "Oh, El Agave's offering

guacamole, and it's really good, you know. It's not what you guys are offering." It's like a domino effect. Everybody starts doing it. But the guacamole's just as authentic as you can get, really, that and the street tacos.

[0:06:45.5]

Deleme: What is your history, both of your histories, in the food industry?

[0:06:48.6]

Lemus: All right. Mine, I grew up in this food industry, basically. My dad used to be a cook, so, you know, through high school, I started working at the local Mexican restaurant. Eventually, when I moved to New Albany to community college, I started working for Juan, and that's how we met, and we just kept a relation after that.

[0:07:18.2]

Deleme: [Spanish].

[0:07:18.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:07:42.0]

Lemus: [Spanish]?

[0:07:42.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:07:48.3]

Delerme: And when did each of you come to Mississippi? Where were you born?

[0:07:53.2]

Lemus: Okay. I was born in Jalisco, Mexico, and we came—my dad brought, actually, he brought the whole family to the U.S., oh, back in 2000—I don't know. I was about eight years old, and I think we started in—we moved to Nashville for, like, six months before we moved to Mississippi, to New Albany. So I say New Albany, to me, is home, because I've been there pretty much—like, it's the majority of my life.

[0:08:23.7]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:08:28.1]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:08:29.4]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:08:29.6]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:08:51.0]

Delerme: Do you have memories of Mexico at that age? Do you remember what life was like?

[0:08:56.3]

Lemus: Very little. I mean, it's kind of like, you know, what you remember as a childhood, your childhood memories, which we go back, and this past year, actually, I took my kids and my wife for the first time, so that was kind of neat. I know, for example, he had more growth in Mexico than I did. Mine was just childhood. I mean, I left when I was second grade, so, you know, it's like what do you remember when you were in first, second grade is what I would remember. But, yeah, when I go back, it's, yeah, very different to me.

[0:09:33.9]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:09:38.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:10:08.2]

Delerme: Why the South? Do you know why you ended up moving to the South, of all places in the U.S.?

[0:10:15.5]

Lemus: It was my dad's decision at the moment, you know. Really, it was just—I think it was work opportunity, what brought us in Mississippi. So, you know, he had a job offer, and it's kind of like, I think, with Juan, was the same thing, you know. It was [Spanish]. It was just him and his brother, and that's what led them to the South, to be honest.

[0:10:37.3]

Leon: [Spanish]. [laughs]

[0:10:43.5]

Delorme: When you arrived, were there a lot of Latinos?

[0:10:45.1]

Lemus: No. All right, I remember this. Whenever we went to New Albany—my mom's very religious, for example, so she would take us to Mass every Sunday. I remember when I was still in high school, even middle school, we would go to Mass, and, you know, it'd be Spanish Mass, and, you know, it's like—it's a very small community, maybe twenty people in Mass. But now you go to Mass now, if you go this Sunday to Mass, they can't fit in the church, you know. They have to make it bigger. So, I mean, the community, the Hispanic community, has been an amazing growth in the last, what, ten, twenty years.

[0:11:21.5]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:11:51.6]

Delorme: What was your experience going to school here, growing up southern, essentially?

[0:11:56.5]

Lemus: Well, I mean, you adjust. I think most people adjust, especially if you're young. For example, it was probably easier for me to adjust to a lifestyle here in the United States, even in the South or anywhere. It was probably a little bit harder for him because he came at an older age. But it was—gosh, I'll be honest with you. I think what I remember being the most challenging was just that first day, because, you know, not only you don't know anybody, you know, you're different, so a lot of times it's kind of like you feel like you don't fit in at all, because, one, you don't know English. I remember I had no idea how do you tell the teacher you have to go to the bathroom. I think that was, like, in third grade, fourth grade in Nashville, and I was just—you know, I would go home, and it's like you go home and you cry to your mom, it's like, "I don't want to go back. It's awful." It was just—it's what you remember. That's one of my memories.

[0:12:51.8]

Delorme: Any other memories you can share with us, either high school, your experiences, what it was like for someone Latino growing up in the South?

[0:12:59.0]

Lemus: Look, the initial part is the hardest. Once you get over that, you start blending in, you start fitting in. You know, by the time I was in high school, I did soccer, cross country, track. I was reading books, I was competing. You know, you had a lifestyle. That first year is probably the hardest for anybody. I mean, memories, I think by high school, I pretty much have the same memories as anybody who was born and raised here, to be honest with you.

[0:13:27.6]

Delerme: And experiences of discrimination wasn't an issue in New Albany, or were there issues in a smaller town?

[0:13:34.2]

Lemus: Yes and no. I mean, I know there are. I don't think I was ever—I can't recall a memory that I was—I guess, like, very minimum discrimination. But, you know, again, I think I was a point that I was—

[0:13:52.7]

Leon: [Spanish]. [laughter]

[0:13:54.5]

Lemus: I think I adapted pretty quickly. I think that was one thing that helped. But I have seen—I got to see a lot of—you know, even just when you're trying to make friends, a lot of times you're not as acceptable as quickly, you know, just because of your origin. But once they overcome that—you know, now there's—for example, you can go to Ripley High School and there's so many Hispanics, that those kids grew up since kindergarten, so for somebody who had students in the same kindergarten, I mean, there's no discrimination. You know what I mean? But everybody else was exposed to it from since they were, you know, little. Now, actually, I've seen a lot of those Hispanic kids, and they speak more English than they do Spanish. I think some don't even know how to speak Spanish, which is amazing to—

[0:14:46.4]

Delerme: So you don't see the culture necessarily being preserved in the next generation?

[0:14:50.4]

Lemus: It's hard. It's definitely—you know, it could be probably stronger at home, but again, there's such—you know, growing up in the U.S., it's a lot of social pressure, so, you know, in a way, there's a lot of push to fit in, to be accepted, but a lot of times they forget where they're coming from, and that's the parents' challenge, how to do that. But I think it just depends. If there's good family values, I think the culture will preserve.

[0:15:19.9]

Delerme: How about you, your experience? [Spanish]?

[0:15:26.5]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:15:49.4]

Delerme: So when you entered into the food industry for the first time, what type of work and labor were you doing?

[0:15:56.3]

Lemus: I started just like anybody else. I mean, my dad would, you know, put me—I remember washing dishes when I was, like, you know, still in school, and cleaning tables, just like any other employee, you know. So I think I've done pretty much any—pretty much just about any role. So that's my experience, and just learn and make some progress, you know.

[0:16:22.4]

Delerme: How about cooking? Do either of you do any cooking?

[0:16:26.1]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:16:38.4]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:16:41.5]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:17:10.8]

Lemus: In a way, it's kind of like what makes us a good teamwork, because his specialty is the back of the house, where mine is a lot of the front. But, you know, that's how we work together, because, I mean, it takes a lot to know—to make everything work. So a lot of times, I can just kind of focus on the front, especially when we open a restaurant. He kind of takes control of the back and I take control of the front, and we make it work.

[0:17:32.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:17:40.8]

Delerme: Have there been any challenges in the industry with either the first restaurant or with this one?

[0:17:46.2]

Lemus: A lot. I would say a lot.

[0:17:49.2]

Delerme: What have some of those challenges been?

[0:17:51.3]

Lemus: Employees. I think that's the biggest right now. In the kitchen, you know, we depend a lot on the Hispanic just because of the food, the culture, the recipes, everything, but, you know, still, just finding employees is, I think, our biggest challenge, a lot of people's challenge, from what I hear.

[0:18:10.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:18:23.7]

Lemus: Keeping your service and your food consistent for a long period of time, you know, I think that's a challenge for any restaurant, but it is for us too.

[0:18:34.1]

Leon: [Spanish]. [laughs]

[0:19:01.1]

Lemus: He lives in Corinth, so it's a two-hour drive. I live in New Albany. It's not as bad, so I go back and forth every day. It's not as big as of a commute, but, you know, for him coming to here, it's four hours out of your day on the road, so, you know, that takes a toll too. [laughs]

[0:19:18.9]

Delorme: And what is it like living in Corinth? [Spanish]?

[0:19:26.6]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:19:48.5]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:19:49.4]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:20:03.1]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:20:04.7]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:20:09.5]

Delorme: How about your culture back from Mexico, your Mexican traditions? Are there anything, anything near and dear to your heart, anything that you've preserved from Mexican culture and practice here and have brought to the South? [Spanish]?

[0:20:26.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:20:31.2]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:20:33.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:20:59.0]

Lemus: [Spanish]. My wife's Colombian, so, you know, I have, like, three subcultures to go around. [laughs]

[0:21:07.6]

Delorme: How do you manage that? I mean, are there certain traditions that you've learned about Colombia, and that—

[0:21:11.9]

Lemus: [unclear].

[0:21:13.3]

Delorme: Can you describe some, some that, again, people aren't familiar with Latino culture or Latin American culture?

[0:21:17.8]

Lemus: Well, I don't know. To me, Colombians are very patriotic, too, so, you know, every Colombian I've met, you know, they love their food, and, you know, so you get exposed to a lot of stuff. I think, you know, in New Albany, there's not many Colombians, but I know if we travel or if there's, like, a Colombian festival, she wants to be part of it, so you get exposed to that.

[0:21:42.0]

Delorme: How about for your children? How have you passed down either a language or culture? Have you been able to? Have they been resistant?

[0:21:49.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:22:35.2]

Lemus: [Spanish]? What was the question?

[0:22:39.4]

Delorme: Your children. So how have your children preserved the culture? Have you been able to pass things down to them?

[0:22:45.6]

Lemus: Mine are a little bit younger, so I guess it's a little bit harder, because my little boy's four and my little girl's two, which it's a struggle, really, because you want them to learn Spanish, but, you know, naturally the English is going to come first to them. But that's where, you know, my family, for example, if my kids stay with, you know, their grandma, you know, it's going to be Spanish, Spanish, Spanish. So I don't know. Still working on that. [laughs]

[0:23:10.3]

Delerme: Okay, okay. That was the next thing I was going ask you about your family, is your parents. So you have your parents here. What has their experience been? Were they in the food industry as well, or what type of work experience have they had?

[0:23:23.1]

Lemus: My dad's always been in the restaurant business since he been to the U.S. He's actually—[Spanish]?

[0:23:28.6]

Leon: Mm-hmm.

[0:23:28.9]

Lemus: My dad's here. He's a partner with us in this building, and, you know, he's kind of retired, but he's always here supporting the crew, and I think the cook that we have here, you know, he was taught under him. I guess that's kind of like his protégé. That's

what I say, because that's the way I look at it. So, you know, he comes and shows his support with employees and comes and hangs out, and he's still very—I mean, that's what his last twenty or more years, he's been in the restaurant business, so that's what he knows.

[0:24:02.3]

Deleme: Has he owned different businesses or is it working and managing restaurants? What have been the different stages that have brought you to this, with two restaurants, partners?

[0:24:12.5]

Lemus: Do you mean mine or my—

[0:24:14.6]

Deleme: Both of you.

[0:24:15.9]

Lemus: I mean, mine has just been—El Agave New Albany was my start. You know, I mean, I was graduated from school and started doing that. My dad's always been involved, so, you know, he's been—I don't know. He's been a cook for—for how many years?

[0:24:31.8]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:24:32.2]

Lemus: He's been retired. I mean, you know, I think he retired like three years ago, so he's just kind of chilling back.

[0:24:41.0]

Delerme: Are there certain specialties that he cooks? Does he do more of the authentic Mexican cuisine?

[0:24:50.2]

Lemus: I mean, [Spanish]. I guess it's a little bit of everything. I mean, to him, it's just the restaurant, you know, whereas—because it's a little bit different. I guess [Spanish].

[0:25:09.7]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:25:11.0]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:25:11.6]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:25:34.2]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:25:40.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:26:03.5]

Delorme: Are there certain dishes that are unique to Jalisco that you have here?

[0:26:08.2]

Lemus: Tacos al pastor, no?

[0:26:09.0]

Leon: Tacos al pastor.

[0:26:09.8]

Lemus: Tacos al pastor, the street tacos.

[0:26:10.4]

Delorme: Okay. Sweet tacos?

[0:26:12.5]

Lemus: No, street-style tacos.

[0:26:15.3]

Delerme: Oh, street style. Okay.

[0:26:16.5]

Lemus: That's what we call them on the menu just to get the—so people can get, like, the concept and the idea of what, you know—but, yeah, I think he's right, because at home we'll cook—even with my wife, if her grandma's here, her mom, like for Christmas, we may do, like, a—we're celebrating Christmas and we may cook a traditional Colombian plate, you know, or we do something Mexican, or, you know. Yeah, that's how you kind of balance it.

[0:26:44.6]

Delerme: Do you see any similarities between Mexican culture and southern culture, or primarily differences?

[0:26:51.7]

Lemus: What do you mean?

[0:26:54.0]

Delerme: With the Mexican culture, traditions that you have, value systems, and then coming to the South, do you see that the two are aligning or at odds?

[0:27:04.4]

Lemus: I don't know. That's a hard question. I mean, the cultures, I mean, they are different, but when it comes down to it, it's kind of like—I guess me now having a family, you know, family values are all the same pretty much anywhere you go.

[0:27:20.0]

Delerme: What are race relations like in Mexico? Do you have a sense? Do you have the same type of discrimination or the same type of social groups that are divided?

[Spanish]?

[0:27:41.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:27:48.9]

Lemus: Way more social racism, but not race, not—

[0:27:53.1]

Delerme: More it's social class?

[0:27:54.1]

Lemus: Yeah. Maybe there's a little racism in social class.

[0:27:57.1]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:28:05.0]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:28:07.5]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:28:09.8]

Lemus: But, I mean, that's anywhere, though. I mean, you know, it's kind of like here if you're from Memphis or if you're from the city or if you live out in the county, you know, but it's not like a violent racism; it's just a little bit difference, I guess.

[0:28:26.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:29:12.0]

Delerme: And what are the reasons that you're seeing, or just if you can speculate, the reasons why you're seeing this influx of Latinos? You described, for instance, the church, where all of a sudden there's this growth. What is it that's pulling people here, and what is it that's causing them to leave Mexico?

[0:29:27.1]

Lemus: Well, I think—

[0:29:31.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:29:32.2]

Lemus: Yeah. Poverty in Mexico, people really just looking for a better opportunity. I know my dad was thinking, you know, it's kind of like you want to offer your kids a better life, right? So, you know, in Mexico, as much as you would go try to find a job here, here, and there, it wasn't enough to feed your kids, so, you know, they say, "Well, they're hiring over here in the U.S.," or, you know, you can start as a cook and you can send money back. I mean, it's like—I mean, that's how everybody kind of got started, which it has changed from what it was twenty years ago, because I think right now there's not a lot of folks from Mexico aren't coming over here. It's a big difference. I think a lot of people haven't realized that.

[0:30:14.2]

Delerme: Okay. That's interesting. I wasn't aware of that. Are you seeing a different group of Latin Americans coming? What are you seeing?

[0:30:20.6]

Lemus: Central American, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador.

[0:30:24.5]

Leon: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, [Spanish].

[0:30:37.1]

Delorme: So you're seeing it in the restaurant business, too, in the industry outside of your restaurants?

[0:30:40.2]

Lemus: Yes, yes, very much, very much. It's different, because, you know, I think—I'm going to say the majority of the immigrants that came from Mexico came, adjusted, they brought their family, and they're here to stay, you know, the majority. There were some that just, you know, they missed it back home or they just didn't fit in or it didn't work out. They actually went back to their country. It's kind of like his parents, for example. They'll come and visit, but they don't come and stay. They just come visit, go back home.

[0:31:11.8]

Delorme: What are the reasons you both decided to stay in the South?

[0:31:15.3]

Lemus: You mean why we decided to stay in the South and not move anywhere in the U.S.?

[0:31:19.2]

Delerme: Right.

[0:31:21.0]

Lemus: I mean, I feel at home, you know. So I guess once you accumulated so many memories of one place, you feel comfortable, you know.

[0:31:32.7]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:32:03.9]

Delerme: And the South was historically black and white. Latinos are, in many ways, newcomers. How do you identify racially or ethnically here? How do you make sense of your identity, being in this space that's changing?

[0:32:18.5]

Lemus: I don't know. That's kind of hard to answer that.

[0:32:25.1]

Leon: [Spanish]?

[0:32:26.6]

Delerme: [Spanish]?

[0:32:42.4]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:32:44.4]

Delerme: [Spanish].

[0:32:45.7]

Lemus: Yeah. You know, I'm different, but, you know, you kind of embraced it, but it's not like you're being discriminated constantly every day. You know, you might budge [phonetic] with somebody because of it, but, I mean, I don't—but I don't think you're discriminated on a daily basis, if that's what you're trying to say. I think people have been more acceptable of the change, because it's been a big change.

[0:33:10.7]

Delerme: Okay. So there's an acceptance. Yes, there's a huge change. I was curious if you felt—

[0:33:13.7]

Lemus: Yeah, there's more acceptance now than it was maybe twenty years ago, but then again, it was an early change, just like anything, you know. I don't know. [Spanish].

[laughs]

[0:33:24.8]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:33:28.6]

Lemus: [Spanish]. It's hard.

[0:33:34.0]

Delerme: I have more questions about food. Tell me about the food you ate growing up and if it looks anything similar to the menu that you now have at the restaurants.

[0:33:48.5]

Lemus: All right. I think in the restaurant-wise—and you can interrupt anytime—I think it's changed a good bit since, let's say, whenever he got started. You know, for once, is we've made some changes. We adjusted to what people like, and, for example, I notice it especially in New Albany, the different generations intend to eat differently. You know what I mean? So somebody, let's say—

[0:34:12.9]

Delerme: [unclear].

[0:34:14.0]

Lemus: Like my friend's grandfather, for example, you know, they were born and raised here. They weren't exposed to Mexican food like, let's say, somebody that I graduated

school with, so they don't know—they'll coming in here and they don't know what to order. They'll go with the, oh, fajitas just because they've heard the word on television or they seen, oh, you know, the commercials on TV, whatever. That's what influenced them. So, for example, now the younger students, they're going to come here and say, "Hey, I want a torta de carnitas," or, "I want some street tacos," and it's something that probably the older people weren't exposed to it, you know. I guess once you grow up being exposed to that kind of food, you know, it changes everything. And I think on the food-wise, I know we've talk about saying that we do and we cook more of the—more meats than they used to be for—or [Spanish] enchiladas, burritos—

[0:35:11.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:35:33.3]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:35:40.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:36:04.7]

Delerme: Who does your customer base tend to be in New Albany and here? Who is it that you're serving primarily?

[0:36:11.7]

Lemus: New Albany, I would say I think everybody, no? I mean, being a small town, you know, students, families, lot of families. You know, here in Oxford, some of the college students, college students, but we have a lot of the local people.

[0:36:30.8]

Delorme: There are locals as well?

[0:36:31.6]

Lemus: Yeah.

[0:36:32.9]

Delorme: Do you have members of the Latino community that tend to come [unclear]?

[0:36:35.5]

Lemus: Yes, we've seen a lot of Latino. You see them a lot on the weekends. A lot of times, you know, they work during the week. They don't really go out as much. I think more Latinos tend to eat on the weekends.

[0:36:45.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:36:57.4]

Lemus: [Spanish]. That's big.

[0:36:59.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:37:07.9]

Delorme: And with the Latino community that you're familiar with, are you seeing challenges that the community is facing, say, in New Albany or Corinth? In Corinth, is the community large, the Latino community *mas*?

[0:37:20.0]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:37:41.0]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:37:44.1]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:37:50.4]

Lemus: [Spanish] car wash or—

[0:37:58.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:38:03.9]

Lemus: [Spanish]. [laughs]

[0:38:07.0]

Delorme: And do you see a lot more restaurants as a result of the growth in population?
Has it become more competitive?

[0:38:12.0]

Lemus: Yeah.

[0:38:14.1]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:38:16.0]

Delorme: In New Albany as well? Have you seen more restaurants being introduced?

[0:38:19.4]

Lemus: Yeah. I think, let's say, for example, whenever Mi Toro opened in Corinth, the nearest Mexican restaurant may be in Tupelo and had recently just opened, if I remember correctly, right?

[0:38:30.3]

Leon: Yeah.

[0:38:31.3]

Lemus: So, I mean, you're talking about, you know, that's an hour drive for the next Mexican restaurant. Now you can't go fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, and you'll find another one.

[0:38:39.7]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:38:41.1]

Delerme: Cuatro?

[0:38:42.1]

Leon: Sí.

[0:38:43.9]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:38:46.1]

Leon: Cuatro, cuatro o cinco. [Spanish].

[0:38:49.4]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:38:50.6]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:38:57.2]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:38:58.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:39:03.3]

Lemus: So, yeah, I mean, that's a lot of—so that's why we focus—and that's why we make pushes, you know, quality, anything from how well you want your place to look from the moment you walk in, to where you're seated or where the plates are being served or how they're being served. You know, back twenty years, they didn't have competition. You didn't worry about that. Now you do. You have to if you want to—you know, if you want to be—

[0:39:28.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:39:37.9]

Delorme: Can you tell us a little bit about the interior design, since you mentioned it, about especially the artwork we see? Is this similar to New Albany? Is this a new design?

[0:39:46.0]

Lemus: [laughs] All right, look. Basically, New Albany and Oxford is—we've just pushed the ideas. If you go to—even nowadays, I think if you go to most Mexican restaurants, they're very similar in the way they look, the way they feel, and we didn't want that. We were trying to do something different, so we were trying to—let's say some people say, "Hey, it looks a little more modern here." It's not as typical or traditional, and it's not that you're losing, you know, it's just you're embracing the changes, and, you know, it's a fresh feel. You know what I mean? I mean, look at McDonald's, and I use them for example, franchises. How often do they renovate their buildings or they change their look? You know what I mean? That's the way I see it.

[0:40:33.8]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:40:47.0]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:40:47.7]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:40:48.5]

Delerme: Sí.

[0:40:49.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:41:00.3]

Lemus: It's like, for example, even the canvas that we did on the bathroom hallway, you know, we did simple black and white, but it's got so much culture, because, you know, those are figures, are through Mexico history, and we put a little description, so if somebody wants to stop by and read it and learn about them, they can. So, you know, like I said, I know we're making changes, but we're trying not to lose the roots. So that's how we kind of balance it.

[0:41:30.5]

Delerme: Is there anything else about your vision, about the restaurant that you want people to know about? Anything about the food or your experiences, of your testimony, so to speak?

[0:41:42.3]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:41:50.9]

Lemus: Repeat yourself again.

[0:41:52.1]

Delerme: Is there anything else you'd like to add, something I didn't ask, anything about the restaurant you want people to know, anything about the food that maybe makes it unique and distinct? Certainly the interior is unique.

[0:42:03.6]

Lemus: Yes. Well, I mean, the thing is—and I use this to every day—if there's something we can improve, I'm going to try. If we're going to make a change, it's to make it better. So I always said, you know, change is good, but it's got to be a gradual change. If your change is too sudden, you know, society's going to reject it. So I don't know. I always say you can always make yourself better. So we apply that. I apply that to my personal life and I apply that to the restaurant. And I don't know what's going to be changing tomorrow. You know, we may try to—if we can afford to boost the quality of meat, we may do that, you know. There's so many things that you can, you know—but it's a constant—you know, it's just something that goes over time, I guess. [Spanish].

[0:42:56.9]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:42:58.9]

Lemus: [Spanish].

[0:42:59.2]

Leon: [Spanish].

[0:43:01.5]

Lemus: Because we make some changes, from the food to the way we train our service. “Hey, I know most Mexican restaurants, look, they may wait tables like this. Look, we’re going to do this differently.” Or, “Hey, we’re going to wear a tie,” for example. I think that’s something that nobody did before, you know. Now you have a couple of them that, you know—so, you know what? Is that even having that button-down shirt, one solid color, it’s just, you know, presentation, the right attention to detail, I guess.

[0:43:26.6]

Delerme: Okay. That’s fantastic. Well, that’s all the questions I had for you. Thank you so much for your time. Appreciate it. And I’m going to go ahead and stop it.

[End of interview]