



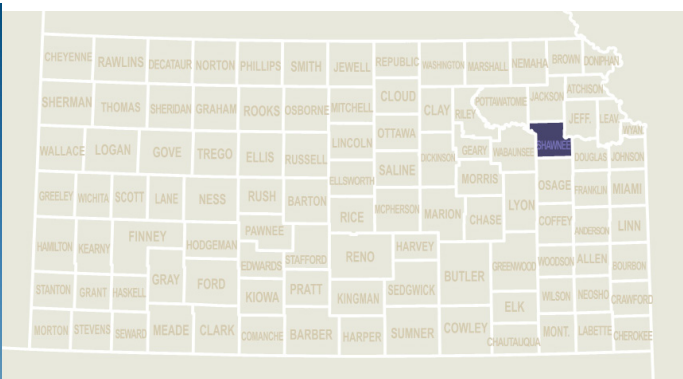
The storefront of Supermart El Torito located in Topeka, KS.

Background

Topeka, KS is located in Shawnee County along the Kansas River in the northeast region of the state. The city of Topeka was officially founded in 1854 by a group of antislavery colonists who came from Lawrence. In 1855, the city's founders chose the name "Topeka," which is Kansa-Osage in origin, and means "a good place to dig potatoes."

Topeka went on to be a center for the free-state movement leading up to the Civil War and was named the capital of Kansas shortly before the Civil War began. Topeka is also known for the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which declared racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional.

Today, Topeka remains the capital city of Kansas and is home to Washburn University. Topeka's economy is based primarily in governmental services, agriculture and manufacturing. Additionally, Topeka is home to several noteworthy attractions, including the Heartland Motorsports Park, the Topeka Performing Arts Center, and the Kansas International Museum.



About the Community

CITY POPULATION* 126, 877

COUNTY POPULATION** 177,499

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME* \$46,890

MEDIAN AGE* 37 years

CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** 19.7%

FAMILIES LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** 10.6%

LOW INCOME & LOW ACCESS TO GROCERY STORE†** 9.5%

PEOPLE WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE†** 24.4%

CHILDREN WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE†** 6.6%

The Issue

Topeka lacked a full-service grocery store providing authentic Hispanic foods despite one quarter of the students in the Topeka Public School district being of Hispanic origin, and a total Hispanic population of more than 19,000 across the city¹. Much of Topeka is urban, rather than rural, and in certain areas of the city, citizens have to walk or drive more than one mile to reach a grocery store. Residents in Topeka and surrounding cities looking were driving to Kansas City or Wichita to find authentic Hispanic foods for their family. Octavio Sosa owned a Hispanic grocery store in Kansas City, and his customers frequently asked him to open another store in Topeka.

“We had a lot of people from Lawrence, Topeka, and Emporia that were coming to our store in Kansas City. And they always asked, ‘why don’t you put a store in Topeka?’”

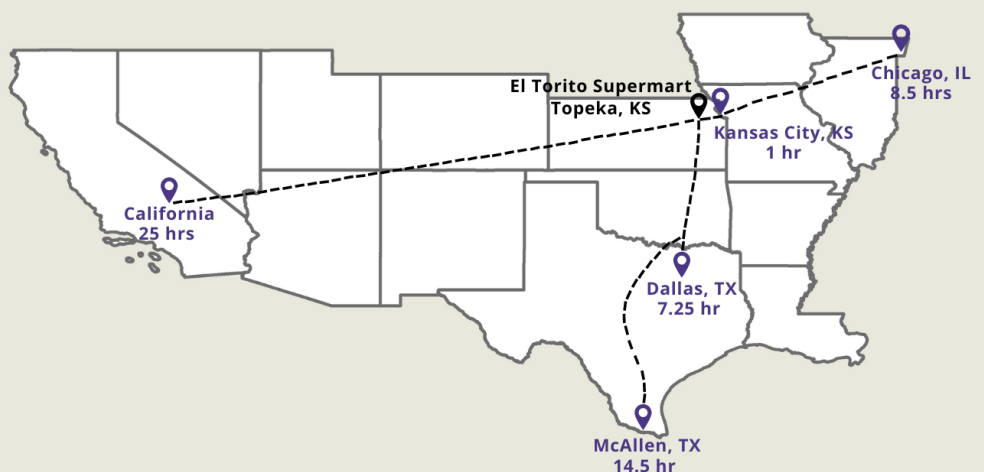
– Octavio Sosa, owner of Supermart El Torito

Eventually, Sosa started to seriously consider the option of opening a second grocery store in Topeka. He considered the existing food landscape as well as the demographics of Topeka. Not only was there a significant Hispanic population in the city, but there were other under-served ethnic groups as well. This provided an opportunity to include a more diverse selection of products in the new store. In response to the feedback from his customers at his store in Kansas City, and the promising customer base in Topeka, Sosa decided to open another store in Topeka.

¹ Kansas Department of Education Data Central, 2018-2019; ACS Estimates 2018

Supermarket El Torito owns their supply chain

Supermart El Torito specializes in providing high quality, culturally appropriate foods for its North Topeka community. One unique way that the store does this is by owning its own distribution company. From California to Texas to Chicago, IL, Supermart El Torito travels to find the highest quality and freshest products to sell at their stores in Kansas.



Bottom left, an image of the produce section in Supermart El Torito. Bottom right, a graphic of the various locations across the country where El Torito's distribution company travels to acquire necessary products for their two Kansas stores.

The Process

TIMELINE

2004

Sosa opened the first Supermart El Torito store in Kansas City, Missouri with his brother-in-law.

2006

After some challenges, Sosa decided to open a new El Torito store on his own in Kansas City, KS that he still owns and operates.

2006 - 2015

Sosa established loyal customers in Kansas City and some of the surrounding areas who began to ask him to expand to another city like Topeka.

2015

Sosa began to consider options for building a store in Topeka.

2016

Architects developed a floor plan for the location in Topeka that incorporated lessons learned from the layout of the store in Kansas City.

2017

Renovations for Supermart El Torito in Topeka began.

November 2017

Sosa applied to KHFI for funding to support the opening of a second location in Topeka.

Spring 2018

Construction is completed, but due to delays in building, Sosa is unable to purchase inventory to fill the shelves and open the store.

October 2018

KHFI funding package approved and used to purchase inventory to open the grocery store.

December 2018

Supermart El Torito opens in Topeka!

The process of opening a second location began with finding an appropriate building for the future grocery store. Rather than build from the ground up, Sosa decided to remodel a former grocery store that had been empty and out of business for more than 8 years. Sosa applied for a bank loan with which he could buy the building, and once it was approved they got to work on renovations. Compared to their first location, the store in Topeka was more than twice the size of their store in Kansas City, so Sosa hired architects to assist in determining the optimal floor plan for the store. In May of 2018, with construction just weeks away from being finished and only a few inspections left to complete, the owners hit a snag. Having spent most of their money on buying, designing and renovating the old building, while simultaneously managing and running their store in Kansas City, they didn't have sufficient funds to purchase inventory. The inventory expense for a store their size was likely to be several hundred thousand dollars. Fortunately, as construction was winding down, financing package through the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative was approved to support purchasing inventory for the store. This allowed Supermart El Torito to open 6 months sooner than originally anticipated on December 22, 2018.



The produce section in Supermart El Torito.

Lessons Learned

✓ Listen to the Customers

From the beginning, the owner of Supermart El Torito has listened to his customers and gone out of his way to provide for them. When customers in his Kansas City store asked if Sosa would open a store in Topeka, he listened, and worked to find a way to open a grocery store that would serve his customers outside of the Kansas City metro area.

“The customers are the most important thing for us, and we need to hear from them, what they need. If they ask for something, we need to help them, to the end.”

– Octavio Sosa, owner of Supermart El Torito

Be Intentional



Before starting construction on Supermart El Torito in Topeka, the owner hired an architect to design the floor plan. While this delayed construction for an entire year, this intentionality set the store up for success. Sosa knew there were improvements that could be made to this store's operations based on his experience in Kansas City. For instance, in Kansas City, deliveries have to be carted through the front door of the store. In Topeka, the loading dock and delivery bay were situated so as to optimize the process of unloading trucks and stocking shelves.

✓ Think Creatively

The owner thought creatively about the components of the store and how they'd fit together. Supermart El Torito includes a restaurant that is able to utilize products past their prime from various departments in the grocery store. This creative thinking allows the entire store to increase efficiencies and minimize food waste.

Project Successes

Supermart El Torito in Topeka demonstrates the importance of listening to customers, being intentional and thinking creatively. It provides authentic and ethnically diverse foods for the Topeka community. The bakery, meat counter, deli, and restaurant are some of the components that make this store unique.



3000 NW Topeka Boulevard
Topeka, KS 66617



“El Torito Topeka”

KHFI Impact



Supermart El Torito opened **6 months** sooner than originally anticipated.



Supermart El Torito projected to create **60 new jobs**.



Saves travel time. “Now with this grocery store, it's less time driving. Instead, I can be home with my kids” – El Torito customer, [Kansas Health Foundation](#)

Icon Credit: The Noun Project by Shashank Singh, Shmidt Sergey, Adrien Coquet

This success story is written by Lauren Scheufler and Rial Carver for the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative. Published October 2020

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