

Multi-Unit Owner Says Del Taco Delivers on Freshness

By Laura Michaels | February 26, 2020

As Mark Miller put it, “I cut my teeth in grocery,” so when he decided to look at franchise brands more than a decade ago, fast food wasn’t much of a stretch. “I’ve always been around food,” said Miller, who owned grocery, food manufacturing and real estate businesses in Oregon. “And I thought fast food, even though it gets a bad rap, it holds a unique and interesting place for consumers in terms of value.”



Miller, who’s CEO of Portland-based 3 Brothers Restaurants, acquired two Del Taco stores in Boise, Idaho, back in 2009 and has since grown his portfolio to 25 locations of the Mexican concept in five states. He recently signed a 10-unit development deal, with plans for six stores in the Yakima and Spokane, Washington, markets and four across his current geographic operating area.

“I’ve fallen in love with the freshness, and how even in fast food they could deliver freshness,” said Miller of the decision to keep growing with Del Taco through a combination of acquisitions and new builds.

Miller’s Northwest markets benefit from an influx of people moving there from California, he said, and they’re bringing Del Taco demand with them. An intense focus on local store marketing, including via a food truck and charity events, has helped build brand awareness, Miller noted.

“We’ve experienced positive comps pretty much every year,” he said, and they’ve been able to turn around some lower-performing locations by executing on four points. “Quality people, service, food and restaurants, we’re consistently addressing those four points,” Miller said.

At the corporate level, Miller noted because Del Taco owns more than 300 of its 580 restaurants, the company understands unit-level operations and the importance of providing franchisees with data to better understand what consumers want. That in turn helps inform local marketing. “They are a franchisee, and they mean that,” he said.

Del Taco’s leaders, including CEO John Cappasola and COO Chad Gretzema, have pushed the brand’s “QSR-plus” positioning, added Miller, and restaurants benefit from that focus on quality, fresh ingredients.