

## INN Success Story Template

**Program:** Iowa Nutrition Network

**Unit:** Wapello County

**Title:** Shop Healthy Iowa in Ottumwa

To improve access to healthier foods for community residents, the Shop Healthy Iowa project encourages small Hispanic retail stores to offer high quality and affordable foods and beverages. Shop Healthy Iowa strategies include activities such as making physical alterations to increase stocking of healthier foods, marketing of healthier foods and beverages, providing technical assistance to store owners, and supporting store owners around nutrition assistance benefit programs.

One of the stores in the project is Mexico Lindo located in Ottumwa. Mexico Lindo was the first Hispanic retail to open in Ottumwa, approximately 15 years ago. For two years, Mexico Lindo has worked with the Shop Healthy Iowa project to increase access to healthier food and provide customers with information to make healthier choices. An added project activity was to make physical changes to the store to improve layout.

To help the store owner, Adolfo Curiel, increase the availability and purchase of healthier foods and beverages, it was necessary to make physical improvements to the store interior. Mr. Curiel worked with Himar Hernandez, ISU Extension & Outreach Assistant Director of Economic and Commercial Development, a critical Shop Healthy Iowa partner. Himar has known the Mr. Curiel for several years and they have developed a trusting relationship. Interior improvements suggested by Himar allowed for improved stocking, displaying, and selling healthier food products.

The store entry presented customers with a wall of different types of chips, hundreds of different types of chips preventing Mr. Curiel from visualizing who was entering or exiting the store. So Himar and Mr. Curiel focused on redesigning the store entry. The entry redesign included moving the wall of chips and several non-working freezers behind the chip shelving. After the chips were relocated, new vegetable shelving was installed. (see photo)

Shelf labeling and other point-of-purchase prompts were added to guide customers to healthier choices, advertise healthier foods, and place healthier options at eye level or in check out areas so they are more likely to be purchased.

New vegetable shelves allow all the produce to be located in a central place, include pricing, and present a cleaner, fresher appearance. Non-working freezers were replaced with new coolers and yellow bins replaced cardboard boxes. Vegetables displayed in the coolers appear cleaner, fresher, and brighter plus more colorful. The coolers also allow Mr. Curiel to quickly view the produce supply. Signs in the cooler section—printed in both English and Spanish—highlight healthy products, including produce such as peppers, tomatoes, and carrots.

When the Shop Healthy Iowa project began, Mexico Lindo provided limited access to fresh produce. This was presented as a business opportunity. The inventory was revamped to introduce new healthy products. Every day, Mr. Curiel sees how the positive changes made in the store encourage customers to make healthier choices. The store's healthy offerings, once limited to a few bananas and some tomatoes hidden near the front counter, are now displayed prominently in a new cooler.

When asked why he had not redesigned the store earlier, Mr. Curiel had never considering store layout and how it affected sales. He had not received any retail training but just opened Mexico Lindo and hoped the store would do well. The store layout changes have included an added safety benefit. Mr. Curiel can now see the front door of the store and who is entering and exiting. He is also able to track the fruit and vegetable supply and if it appears appealing and fresh.

**Favorite Quote:**

“I never received any training in store retail. I just opened the store and hoped it would go well.”

**Background:**

Local IDPH Contractor: ISU Extension & Outreach Wapello County

Setting: improving small stores in underserved areas to increase the accessibility and promotion of healthier foods

Target Audience: Ottumwa shoppers

Key Partners: ISU Extension & Outreach, IDPH

Contact Information (name, email): Himar Hernandez, himarh@iastate.edu

Date: 4/3/17

