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# HOW ONE MAN PLANS TO CHANGE THE WORLD WITH A GLASS OF HORCHATA

The story of an immigrant working under DACA who sells horchata and his mother's tamales behind the bar of a cidery in downtown Eugene.



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By Jess Rose

"I'll have a glass of the Solera please," I excitedly proclaimed to Angel, who welcomed me into WildCraft Cider Works with smiling eyes from behind the bar. Angel is an energetic, kind spirited man from Mexico City who moved to the United States with his family when he was 10. Angel is a worker safeguarded under DACA. He volunteers his time at WildCraft every Wednesday through Sunday as a bartender in exchange for the opportunity to sell his homemade horchata and his mother's tamales. The first time I visited WildCraft, Angel asked me if I'd like to buy any tamales. He recognized the fact that I was new to the taproom and took a moment to sell me on his mother's delicious recipe, while at the same time asking if I'd like to sample his homemade horchata. I said yes, of course. Horchata is a traditional Mexican drink made up of white rice soaked in water. It's flavored with cinnamon and sweetened with sugar. It's creamy and delicious and resembles the flavor of the milk in a bowl of cinnamon toast crunch. Recipes vary amongst households and restaurants, making it as unique a drink as the person who crafts it. Now every Friday I find myself dropping in for a cider and a 12-pack of tamales. I can't resist the delicious homemade taste and at just \$2 a tamale, it is quite the steal.

I sat down with Angel one evening after he wrapped up a five hour shift at WildCraft. He had already had a busy day, waking up at 4am to make horchata deliveries to a couple of restaurants in town before his first gig of the day at Voodoo Doughnut. He was eager to tell me more about who he is and what he's passionate about. I would soon learn that Angel is a hustler, and for good reason. He has big plans for his future and he is using his time at WildCraft to build his network, escape the debt that entrapped him during COVID-19, and conjure up plans to build out the brand of his horchata business.

Angel is not new to the food service industry. In his early career, he was working backend and line cook jobs at various restaurants in town. While those early gigs provided Angel with much needed financial support, they didn't allow him creative freedom in the kitchen, which he desperately desired. It wasn't until Angel was 28, and he applied for and attained DACA, that he could establish himself. He eventually landed a job at The Flying Squirrel that provided him with a more customer-facing cooking role. It was there that Angel was first able to cook his own recipes and personally deliver his food to the guests, which he loved. Since then, he has taken on numerous jobs including gig working with DoorDash, catering kids birthday parties (thanks to a connection made at the Flying Squirrel), and selling his authentic horchata and Mexican cuisine at various pop-ups and local shops around town. Angel attributes his talent as a chef to his mother, who taught him early on how to be creative with food. Angel says that thanks to her, he's confident that he can make delicious food out of just one ingredient.

Like for so many in the food service industry, 2020 was a very difficult year. COVID-19 derailed Angel's plans of opening his very own food truck that would feature a more diverse menu inclusive of not only his horchata and his mother's tamales, but an array of authentic Mexican dishes like tacos and enchiladas. He had been saving up money and was nearly ready to purchase a truck when the pandemic struck. Angel struggled just to stay afloat. With all of his savings lost, that dream of owning and operating his own food truck would have to take a seat on the backburner. Angel never stopped hustling though and during that lull in work and life, Angel meticulously thought out plans for his future.

At the turn of the new year, and with more and more businesses opening their doors to customers again, the future for Angel was looking a bit brighter. Angel landed a few more pop-up gigs and it was at one particular gig he met Sean, the owner of WildCraft Cider Works. Sean ordered two tacos and a tamale. And as it usually is when meeting Angel for the first time, an interesting and engaging conversation was sparked. WildCraft had been stirring up ideas on how to sell food in their taproom, as is required for them to stay in operation under their current licensing. Without an industrial kitchen on site, that made it ever more challenging. After chatting for some time, Angel said, "Why don't you let me sell my horchata and my mother's tamales in your store." In that moment, a partnership was born. Angel set up shop shortly after and he can be found working behind the bar every Wednesday through Sunday in WildCraft. He volunteers his time and in turn, is able to sell his beloved recipes. WildCraft is able to meet their licensing requirements and Angel, who doesn't have insurance for his business, gets to operate under the safety of a legal establishment.

Angel flies a bit under the radar. There are no signs out front or flyers at the register. When asked why, Angel says he doesn't need them. He loves connecting with customers and has a knack for remembering them. So when a new face walks through the door, he's excited and ready to tell them all about his food and drink offerings. The idea of food as connection became an important part of Angel's story and weaves itself into the fabric of his work today and his future aspirations as a business owner.

Angel feels very passionately about horchata and he believes it's his million dollar idea. While his food truck would have featured an array of delicious eats and treats, he says his friend Michael, owner of Dominican Delights, inspired him to keep things simple. "I want to build a community around my horchata," Angel told me. He believes horchata has the power to connect all people, of all ages, and all walks of life. That's why he is focusing on lifting his horchata business off the ground. But there are a few steps that need to happen first in order to make this dream of his a reality. Angel makes the horchata from his home and it isn't pasteurized.

This time intensive process to bottle and deliver requires a timeliness to ensure freshness wherever the horchata ends up. With a shelf life of just a couple of days, you can imagine the challenge that Angel faces. He keeps his dream alive by staying organized and setting goals. That's why by March 24th, 2022, on his 38th birthday, Angel hopes to be debt free and the owner of a brand new pasteurizer. Plans have been in the works with the folks at Wildcraft and Angel is looking to house this new pasteurizer in Wildcraft's cider mill.

Angel's plans don't stop there. Angel is focusing on community first, so that when he is ready to sell his horchata at scale, he has a community of supporters behind him. He believes this networked connection will jumpstart a revolutionary movement that will give power and opportunity to those who need it most. He plans to pay back some of his success to his mother, who continues to inspire him and support him throughout this process. After all, she is the master chef behind the tamales that Angel sells. He is also building out a framework to support other undocumented workers through meaningful employment and networking. Angel is not only a fantastic chef, but a musician as well. He is currently working on an album that is planned for release in early 2022 titled *DACA*. In it, Angel touches on the struggles he and his family faced while living in Mexico and the courage it took to uproot their lives and move to the States.

Angel still works at WildCraft Cider Works Wednesday through Sunday. Next time you're in the area, hop in for a sip of horchata and a 12-pack of tamales. You'll be glad that you did. You can also find him on social media @playedbyangel or at the next pop-up in town.

Jess Rose is a master's student at the University of Oregon studying advertising and brand responsibility. She is particularly interested in the use of empathy mapping to tell stories of culture, tech, and design. @jaymrose8820