Hollywood, MD - It never fails. When word gets around that a new Mexican restaurant is opening somewhere in Southern Maryland the trolls go crazy. “Again?” “Not another Mexican Restaurant?” It prompts the question, “why does our area have so many Mexican restaurants?” This answer may or may not surprise you, it may delight or disgust you—but here it is. Simply put, Americans love Mexican food.

There’s voluminous evidence to back that up, too. According to CHD Expert, in 2014 there were 54,000 Mexican restaurants across America, 8 percent of the total U.S. restaurant landscape. That year consumers spent $39 billion at Mexican eateries.

According to the Christian Science Monitor, the amazing rise in Mexican cuisine is documented in Gustavo Arellano’s 2012 book “Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America.” Arellano is a California-based journalist who writes a syndicated column called “Ask a Mexican.” He notes that tacos have become “an American institution.” There are many kids who’d rather have a taco than a hamburger just about any time. Why not? It’s mostly ground beef, too. And no, Mr. All-American, the Germans, not us Yanks, invented the hamburger. Eating a taco is as American as eating a hot dog—which the Germans also invented.

“So, what is that stuff on my plate?” You ask. Well, it’s rice, it’s beef, a crunchy shell made with corn, plus lettuce, tomatoes, avocado—is there a problem? People eat sushi (raw fish?), they love calamari (fried octopus??), they die for scrapple (hmmm…well, scientists and scholars disagree with exactly what that is). If you think about it, Mexican food seems pretty normal, almost like comfort food. Even the beans, which are called “refried” (I’ve always wondered if these are leftovers or did the chef screw up the first time he fried them?) are very palatable and healthy.

There’s another reason for locals to love the Mexican restaurant boom and it may not please your palate but your sense of community should get a boost. The Mexican restaurant market is dominated by independents. They are, by and large, authentic local businesses. Yes, some are amazingly successful and some are doomed to be dismal failures. But that’s what America’s Free Enterprise System is all about.

The latest mass rant about Mexican restaurants was prompted by the announcement that Taco Bell was adding a location in Dunkirk. Like so many cuisines, Mexican has many “quick service” restaurants and Taco Bell—which has been in business for 55 years, is the leader. Some question its authenticity. Quora writer James McInnes says Taco Bell’s food is “inspired by Mexican cuisine” but, due to the types and textures of the ingredients used, isn’t authentic Mexican cuisine. Still, that shouldn’t cause anyone to drop their chalupa. If you enjoy it and savor it, who cares if it isn’t authentic?

So we doff our sombrero and declare, “welcome to our town” to the aspiring and enterprising Mexican restauranteurs locating in our area. And to all the happy customers, “enjoy your meal, con mucho gusto!”

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