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# El Burrito Mercado cuts back business amid immigration crackdown



Image: Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal

Guests shop at El Burrito Mercado in St. Paul. This photo was taken several weeks ago.

NANCY KUEHN | MSPBJ



By [Alyxandra Sego](#) – Reporter, Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal  
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## Story Highlights

- El Burrito Mercado cut hours and staff amid sales decline.
- Immigration raids sparked fear among Latino customers, reducing foot traffic.
- The St. Paul store is monitoring doors for ICE presence.

El Burrito Mercado, an iconic staple of St. Paul's West Side neighborhood, is cutting back operations, citing immigration raids that it says are sparking fear among its Latino customers and reducing the store's foot traffic in an already slower year for business.

Last week, after Immigration and Customs Enforcement began operations targeting immigrants with deportation orders in the Twin Cities, CEO Milissa Silva posted on social media that El Burrito Mercado would operate with fewer hours, fewer products on shelves and reduced hours for staff. Since last week, the Mexican grocer and restaurant is also taking extra steps to monitor for signs of ICE agents.

Notices on the store's front door and website said the establishment was closed as of Monday morning, but there was an employee on site directing customers to enter through the back.

At the back door, another employee asked customers if they were there to shop or eat at the restaurant. According to employees the Business Journal spoke with, the extra precautions are in place to prevent ICE from entering the premises.

Silva said El Burrito Mercado is also using delivery services for grocery and takeout, as well as curbside pick-up, to encourage Latino customers to shop at the store.

Silva, whose parents established the market and restaurant in 1979, spent Monday afternoon greeting customers at the store's back door.

El Burrito Mercado was already visited by federal enforcement agents earlier Monday in the parking lot, she said. By monitoring the doors, the store is trying to help shoppers feel safe once they are inside, she said.

"We have the right to deny ICE access to private areas without a judicial warrant," the front door reads.

El Burrito Mercado last week was featured as a [Twin Cities Icon](#) by the [Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal](#). In an interview with the Business Journal for that feature, the Silvas said they had to tighten the business' budget after seeing a drop in their Latino customers, who fear deportation and ICE arrests amid the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

The drop in business caps following the ICE operations caps off a tough year for the business, Silva said. In addition to immigration fears, Silva said high inflation and issues with SNAP benefits during the federal shutdown have caused the decline in business.

Last week, she had to cut hours for the bar and reduce hours for staff who make pre-made food. With less food being sold, Silva also had to take down an 18-foot shelf and reduce product availability.

"These decisions are painful, but necessary as we navigate a very challenging time," Silva [posted on social media](#) last week.

According to Silva, weekdays have become extremely slow for El Burrito Mercado.



"Grocery and produce is where we felt the most loss," Silva said.



From left, Suzanne, Milissa and Analita Silva are the owners of El Burrito Mercado in St. Paul.

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Silva also recently told the [Pioneer Press](#) that the decision to reduce hours was due to immigration fears.

"It's shopping habits. They're buying smaller quantities. The immigrant community being very fearful ... that's obviously keeping folks away," she told the Pioneer Press.

Founded in 1979, El Burrito Mercado operates a sit-down restaurant and bar as well as a specialty grocery and gift shop. The business also runs a catering service, a food truck, and began selling food at the [Minnesota State Fair this year](#).

After their parents retired in 2016, Silva took over the business with her siblings Suzanne and Tomas Silva, along with Suzanne's daughter Analita Silva. Milissa is CEO with 55% ownership, Suzanne is director of administration with 30% and Analita is director of food service with 15%. Tomas runs the food truck operations.

Milissa Silva told the Business Journal that the pandemic was more manageable than what it's facing now.

"There were rules and policies put in place that gave us directions and [told us] how to operate a business safely and we took measures beyond that," she said.

"Right now, that doesn't exist – everything from inflation to all the immigration stuff that's happening."