

# #6- Fillos - Keeping Traditions Fresh

Founder: Daniel Caballero



Interviewer: Adam Amin

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## Intro

Daniel and Antonio Caballero, Cuban brothers raised in Illinois, merged tradition with innovation to create a brand that honors the rich culinary heritage of Latin America while catering to modern lifestyles. To make authentic flavors accessible and convenient for today's busy consumers, Fillos specializes in premium, ready-to-eat sofrito beans, and other Latin-inspired products.

## Background and Inspiration

The Caballero brothers' deep connection to food began in their childhood, when meals were a time for family gatherings, often centered around traditional dishes like beans with sofrito and rice. "It was just the time where we get together as a family every night over dinner and eat together and enjoy," Daniel recalls.

Their cultural and culinary foundation, coupled with a passion for cooking, guided Daniel toward a career in the food industry. Even as an undergraduate, Daniel enjoyed introducing his friends to the traditional Cuban and Panamanian dishes he grew up with. "Good food is good food," Daniel said, reflecting on how his peers, regardless of their backgrounds, appreciated the authentic flavors.

## The Rise of Fillos

The idea for Fillos was born out of a personal pain point: the lack of time and convenience in preparing traditional Latin American dishes amidst busy work schedules. "We didn't have time to prepare or the foresight really to plan and prepare certain foods that I grew up eating and

enjoying," Daniel explained. Observing the success of other ready-to-eat products like Tasty Bite, Daniel realized there was a gap in the market for a premium Latin American offering.

In 2015, the brothers began experimenting with pressure cooking to develop a line of ready-to-eat sofrito beans that maintained the home-cooked quality and rich flavors of the dishes he grew up with. "We saw like, okay, even if we overcooked these things...they still come out tasting really good," Daniel noted.

With the help of the Good Food Accelerator program sponsored by Whole Foods, the brothers refined their product and connected with key retailers. By the time Fillos launched in Whole Foods Midwest in 2017, the brand had already built strong relationships and generated interest through continuous R&D and feedback from potential retail partners.

## Product Innovation and Market Reception

Fillos initially targeted consumers who grew up with traditional Latin American dishes, aiming to provide a product that was authentic in flavor and quality. "We definitely want to get the flavor profiles and the quality right so that individuals who grew up with the foods...they might look at it a little skeptically, but when they taste it, they say, oh yeah, this might not be exactly what I had in my household...but this is in the direction of what it should be," Daniel explained.

However, Daniel soon discovered that Fillos' sofrito beans appealed to a broader audience. Consumers began using the beans in creative ways— from bean dips and burritos to salad toppers and even crostini toppings at wine festivals. This versatility demonstrated that while the product retained its traditional roots, it also fit seamlessly into a wide range of modern culinary contexts, inspiring their tagline 'Keep traditions fresh.' "It shows that when people like a product, they'll find ways to just make it work with their own life," Daniel observed.

The launch of Fillos' "walking tamales," an attempt to turn the Mexican masa dish into an on-the-go snack, further exemplified the brand's commitment to both tradition and innovation. Unlike the sofrito beans, which involved close collaboration with retailers, the walking tamales were quietly developed and introduced through strategic community events. "(The company) really just released it when it was ready and did a lot of (their) work in the background," Daniel shared,

## Challenges and Strategic Decisions

Still, navigating the complexities of the food industry brought challenges for the Caballeros. The intricate supply chain, from ingredient sourcing to logistics, required constant negotiation and strategic pricing decisions to ensure profitability while maintaining product quality. "The distributors, the retailers, the brands, and the manufacturers are all kind of always negotiating who gets what piece of the pie," Daniel said.

Despite these challenges, Fillos has consistently found ways to thrive, now being in over 3000 stores across America. The brand's success can be attributed to the company's methodical approach—taking one step at a time, carefully aligning with manufacturing partners, and adjusting strategies based on market feedback.-Daniel emphasized the importance of continuous adaptation needed when navigating through the multi-faceted dimensions of industry. "If the product goes to market and after demos and some trial, the repeat purchase rate isn't high, the velocities are not growing in store, then you realize, you know, something's not aligned," he continued by outlining the many factors that go into a product's success, or lack thereof, "maybe it's priced too high or the product itself isn't resonating, or maybe it's not getting attention on the shelf for some reason, or maybe some stores aren't putting it where they claim they would, all these different moving parts to kind of assess, or maybe it was just, hey, I thought this would work and it didn't," Daniel told me.

## Impact and Community Engagement

Fillos is committed to giving back to the community, partnering annually with different organizations to support charitable causes. In 2023, they ran a promotional discount with Whole Foods and the Whole Cities Foundation, where all savings were donated to support the foundation's goals. Carrying on the family's belief in the power of food to create positive change, Fillos has supported Justice of the Pies, a bakery started by Maya Camille Broussard, that runs several cooking and baking workshops for children during the year in an effort to end food insecurity, "We partnered with Maya and would join her at those events to contribute to those cooking lessons." Daniel shared.

## Conclusion

The Caballero family's journey with Fillos is a testament to the power of tradition and innovation in the food industry. By staying true to their roots while embracing new opportunities, the brothers have built a brand that resonates with a diverse audience, and brought the rich flavors of Latin America to kitchens across the country. Fillos offers convenience and authenticity, fosters community, and supports meaningful causes, helping it rise to the top in the world of ethnic food products.

You can find their products at [fillos.com](https://fillos.com), or at your local grocery store's grain aisle!

## Adam's takeaway

One unique aspect of Daniel and Antonio's story was their commitment to family tradition while simultaneously staying open to innovation. They wanted to make their family recipe accessible to markets in the US, and to do that, they needed to come up with processes unfamiliar to them and the food industry. Their adherence to tradition wasn't so strict that they couldn't innovate, it was rather the opposite, founding on tradition which allowed them to build innovatively.

