



SCOTT MACDONALD/SOUTH COUNTY LIFE

A look down a frontage road in Chualar.

Finding a food oasis

Taquería Hidalgo on Grant Street in Chualar

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For South County Life

The traveler on Highway 101 will see a dense clump of buildings on the east side of Highway 101 about 10 miles south of Salinas.

Chualar, a hamlet of about 3,000 souls, is fighting with Monterey County, which governs it, to expand its amenities. In the meantime, however, its small markets provide a convenient place to pick up soft drinks for the road, and it's worth the drive to visit Taquería Hidalgo.

Established four years ago,

DETAILS

Taquería Hidalgo, 23477 Grant St., Chualar. Phone: 679-2384. Hours: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Taquería Hidalgo has become an oasis in the middle of nurseries and fields surrounding Chualar.

"We prepare the food with hygiene," said Araceli Cortes, who is in charge of the business.

The menu is fast Mexican food: traditional tacos, quesadillas and burritos, with the occasional all-American hamburger available, too. Breakfast

comes with rice, beans, eggs and your choice of meat. The breakfast and lunch options include a large variety of seafood tostadas and the Mexican version of pupusas called *gorditas*, with chicharrón (fried pork skin) or cheese.

Vegetarians can find salads, vegetarian burritos or tostadas. Highly recommended are the *flautas*, fried taquitos with guacamole, lettuce and cheese. For children, there are quesadillas or tacos with no chili.

The prices are hard to beat: Tacos are \$1.10, quesadillas \$4.25. Flautas with chicken, fresh cheese and avocado are \$3.99.

Fresh juices including orange, carrots, celery and beets are offered. If it's cold outside, hot chocolate or tea can warm visitors up.

On Saturday and Sunday, customers can order pozole (corn meal soup) or menudo (tripe soup), two typical Mexican dishes.

Those in a real hurry can visit Tortillería La Fiesta next to Taquería Hidalgo, where you will find carnitas (braised pork), tortillas made with traditional nixtamal corn dough and very hot jalapeños: Assemble-your-own pork tacos to go.