

CHILE ADVANCE

Innovation: Sandia chile pepper, traditionally red, now comes in green variety
Waiting over: 'People have been wanting a new Sandia variety for a long time'



ROBIN ZIELINSKI — SUN-NEWS

Danise Coon, New Mexico State University Chile Breeding Program senior research specialist, stands in the NMSU seed vault to display the Chile Pepper Institute's NuMex Sandia Select green chile seeds. The new variety of chile took about eight years to perfect.

By Lindsey Anderson
landerson@lcsun-news.com
[@l_m_anderson](https://twitter.com/l_m_anderson) on Twitter

LAS CRUCES » The new seeds are inconspicuous, filling a handful of 1.5-pound coffee bags and tucked at the bottom of a shelf in the Seed Vault.

The repository — kept between 34 degrees and 40 degrees Fahrenheit — holds decades of seeds grown and developed by New Mexico State University's Chile Pepper Institute.

On that bottom shelf is the institute's newest star: NuMex Sandia Select, a new variety, previously used as red chile, that can now be used as green chile.

"There's been a lot of buzz about this, so I think it will be very popular," said Danise Coon, an agricul-

+ **Online:** Peek inside the Chile Pepper Institute's Seed Vault with Sun-News videos by reading this story at LCSUN-NEWS.COM.

tural research scientist at the Chile Pepper Institute. "People have been wanting a new Sandia variety for a long time."

Seed packets are now on sale for \$5 at the Chile Pepper Institute. Proceeds benefit NMSU's Endowed Chile Pepper Research Chair campaign.

Local company Biad Chili will also sell roasted NuMex Sandia Selects, maybe as early as this August, and seeds beginning in 2015 or 2016, co-owner Chris Biad said.

Word got out about the



JUSTIN BANNISTER — NMSU PHOTO

NMSU's Chile Pepper Institute unveils its newest chile variety, NuMex Sandia Select.

"There's been a lot of buzz about this, so I think it will be very popular."

— Danise Coon, agricultural research scientist at the NMSU Chile Pepper Institute

Chile

FROM PAGE 1

upcoming variety a few years back, and people have been calling about it, asking when the seed will be released, Coon said.

"I get excited about it because I think it's an improvement," Biad said.

Traditional Sandia chile tends to be shorter, with thinner walls, so growers ripen the fruit into red chiles and process the pods for red chile powder and chile flakes, experts said.

"Growers wanted a Sandia; they loved it, but it was not great for green chile," Coon said.

The NuMex Sandia Select has better flavor, a thicker fruit wall, a higher heat level and more uniformity among the plants and pods, meaning its easier to process and peel, Coon said. Those characteristics make it a great green chile, experts say.

"I think it's needed in the industry — a good, hot variety," Biad said.

The variety is eight years in the making.

"Because we do everything by classical breeding methods, it takes some time," Coon said.

New chiles are developed

NUMEX SANDIA SELECT

What: New variety of pepper traditionally used as a red chile, which can be used as a green

How: Better flavor, thicker fruit wall, higher heat level and more uniformity among plants and pods

Where to buy: NMSU's Chile Pepper Institute, Gerald Thomas Hall Room 265, 945 College Ave.

Online: chilepepperinstitute.org

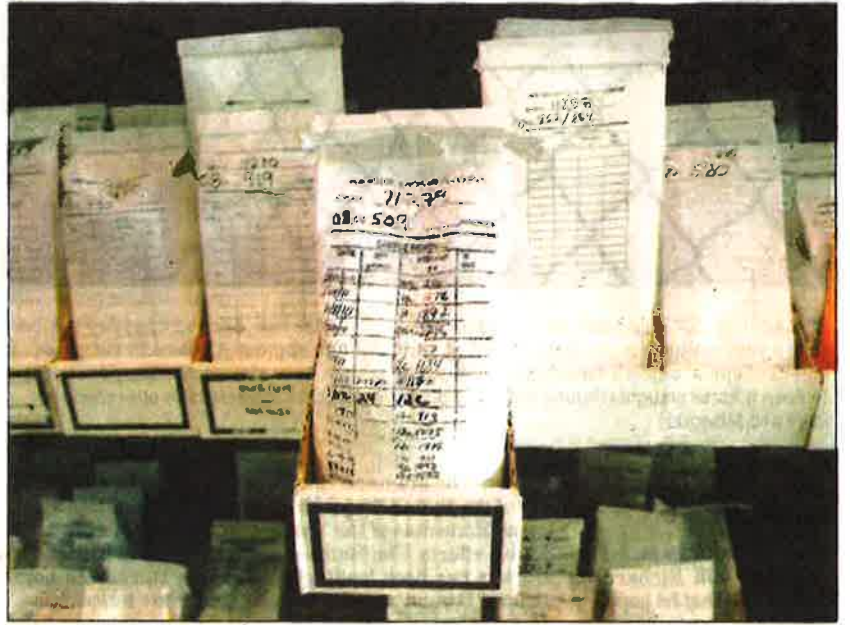
Cost: \$5-6 per seed packet, \$50 for a pound

using grade-school genetics: find chiles with desired traits, like strong walls or a uniform pod, and breed them with similar desirable chiles until a new variety is produced, all with those preferred characteristics.

The plants are not genetically modified, meaning engineers alter the plant's genetic material.

"None of the chiles that come out of NMSU are GMO, and they will never be," Coon said.

For the NuMex Sandia Select, the Chile Pepper Institute crew — made up of undergraduate and graduate students, professor Paul "Chileman" Bosland and Coon — turned to old Sandia seeds, likely from the origi-



ROBIN ZIELINSKI — SUN-NEWS

Bags filled with chile seeds line the NMSU seed vault. The vault is cooled between 35 to 40 degrees and humidity levels are closely regulated to provide chile seeds with the best storage conditions.

nal 1950s variety, Coon said. They then bred the plants into the new chile.

The plants are grown at the Fabian Garcia Science Center and Leyendecker Plant Science Center in the Mesilla Valley.

Biad Chili, which works closely with NMSU, takes the small amount of seed NMSU develops and mass

produces it.

The release of a new chile variety is not common in New Mexico, Biad said. The Chile Pepper Institute has developed about 50 varieties since the 1920s, including ornamental chile plants, Coon said.

Some recent releases include the Heritage New Mexico 6-4 and the Heritage

NuMex Big Jim in 2008.

About 10 new chile varieties are in the works, Coon said. Among them are vibrantly colored jalapeño peppers, a break from the fruit's traditional green hue, likely to be released next year.

Lindsey Anderson can be reached at 575-541-5462.