



BROOK STOCKBERGER / SUN-NEWS

DANISE COON, program coordinator of the Chile Pepper Institute at NMSU, peeks through a couple of the gift packages featuring Holy Jolokia hot sauce and salsa that are for sale at the institute's office. Since it first hit the shelves in April 2009, about 35,000 bottles of Holy Jolokia hot sauce have been sold around the world.

# EN FUEGO

*Hot sauce sales beat expectations,  
bring in money for NMSU*



## COVER STORY

## Holy Jolokia sales sizzle in first year

By Brook Stockberger

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LAS CRUCES — You may cringe at puns, but this ballad of Holy Jolokia cries out for such a literary device.

So, with apologies to no one, here it goes:

*Institute catches fire with hot sauce  
Holy Jolokia sings expectations  
Chile lovers burn for the new flavor*

OK, we'll stop right there, but you get the picture.

In case you have not heard of the product, Holy Jolokia is a hot sauce, and now salsa too, made from the hottest chile peppers on the planet, the Bhut Jolokia, also known as the "ghost chile."

Diganta Saikia, a farmer in India who grew up around the fruit, once told The Associated Press that, "When you eat it, it's like dying."

The folks at New Mexico State University, though, hope your experience will be more pleasant than that. And for them, it has been a fun and surprising run. NMSU's Chile Pepper Institute has teamed up with Ohio-based Cajohn's Fiery Foods to create the hot sauce, and sales have been brisk.

## Beating expectations

Since it first hit the shelves in April 2009, about 35,000 bottles of Holy Jolokia hot sauce have been sold around the world, with some of the proceeds going directly to the Chile Pepper Institute.

"We had no idea there would be this much interest," said Danise Coon, program coordinator of the Chile Pepper Institute at NMSU. "We are constantly running out. We already have our Holy Jolokia addicts."

John Hard, the owner of Cajohn's Fiery Foods which has 12 employees at its base in Columbus, Ohio, said he did not expect such a response in the first year.

"It's one of our top two selling sauces," Hard said. "We are very surprised by it."

Locally, you can purchase the hot sauce, which costs \$10 per bottle, at the institute's office in room 265 in Gerald Thomas Hall on the NMSU campus. Also, the product is available at the NMSU bookstore, El Solamento de Mesilla near the Mesilla Plaza and from Lytle Farms in Hatch.

Mark Gladden, the major gifts offi-

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► To see how some of your fellow Las Cruces react to tasting Holy Jolokia hot sauce, go to [lcsun-news.com](http://lcsun-news.com) and click on the link at the top of this story.

## On the Web

► Chile Pepper Institute: [chilepepperinstitute.org](http://chilepepperinstitute.org)

► Cajohn's Fiery Foods: [cajohns.com](http://cajohns.com)

► The Paradise Shops: [theparadisesops.com](http://theparadisesops.com)

cer for NMSU's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, said that there are efforts under way to get the product in more stores in southern New Mexico.

"We thought it was, frankly, too hot for wide distribution," Gladden said. "We thought it would do well, we were optimistic, but we didn't know it would happen so quickly."

Outside of the Las Cruces area, Holy Jolokia can be found in more than a dozen The Paradise Shops, which operates stores in more than 70 airports and hotels across the U.S. and Canada. In fact, the company, along with NMSU and Cajohn's Fiery Foods, held an event on Friday at the El Paso International Airport to celebrate the sauce's success.

Sylvia Hendrickson recently tried some of the sauce at the Farmer's Market on the Downtown Mall.

"This has got some bite in the tongue," she said. "It's good, though." Jimmy Zabarskie said he liked the taste.

"I would describe it as more full-flavored than Tabasco sauce," he said. "The hot kinda gets me at the end."

## Genesis

The Chile Pepper Institute reports on its website that it "is a research-based nonprofit organization devoted to education, research, and archiving information ... (and) we are dedicated to educating the world about the wonders of chile peppers."

Paul Bosland co-founded the institute and spearheaded the effort to recognize the world's hottest chile

pepper and, in 2006, the Guinness Book of World Records confirmed the fact that, at more than one million Scoville Heat Units — which is about 100 times hotter than the average jalapeño — the Bhut Jolokia is the world's hottest.

Hard said that when he and his wife, Sue, learned about the Chile Pepper Institute, they decided to pay a visit. They were so impressed with the institute that they wanted to help out.

Maybe there was a product that could be sold and some of the proceeds used to help out NMSU?

"We came up with idea and approached the institute," Hard said.

Coon said the concept was very welcome.

"We're working on an endowed professorship chair for the chile institute," Coon said. She said if, one day when Bosland decides to retire, the institute was ever closed, "that could be devastating for the state."

Coon said they need to raise \$1 million to endow the chair.

"We want to keep chile pepper research at NMSU indefinitely," she said.

NMSU worked closely with Cajohn's to develop the product and even came up with the marketing plan and the label.

## The future

The story of Gatorade, which was developed at the University of Florida and has now made the school a lot of money through royalties, is legend on many college campuses.

Is it possible NMSU could have similar success with Holy Jolokia?

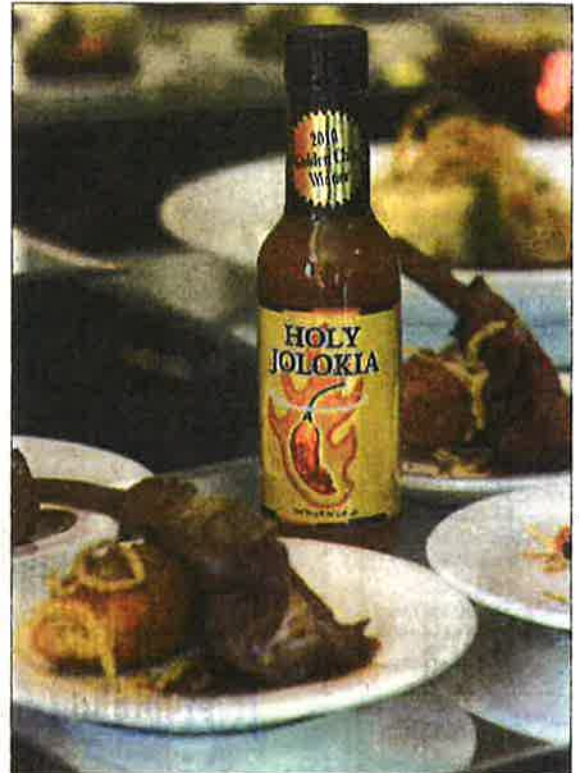
Gladden said he does not mind thinking big.

"In five years, we might have our own Tabasco," he said.

NMSU keeps all the proceeds from what it sells on campus and also makes about \$1 a bottle from what Cajohn's Fiery Foods sells. Each bottle contains the logos of NMSU and the Chile Pepper Institute on the label, as well as a paragraph to inform customers that some of what they spend will help support research. The institute's website, [chilepepperinstitute.org](http://chilepepperinstitute.org), is also included.

Christine Rogel contributed to this story

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COURTESY PHOTOS

**HOLY JOLOKIA** is a hot sauce, and now salsa too, made from the hottest chile peppers on the planet, the Bhut Jolokia, also known as the "ghost chile."



**MARK GLADDEN**, New Mexico State University major-gifts officer, bites into cold smoked lamb that was topped off with blackberry demi-glace and Holy Jolokia hot sauce.