

HECHO EN LAS CRUCES

GETTING

Written by ISABEL A. RODRIGUEZ

SPICY



WANT TO FEEL GOOD? HAVE SOME CHILE! ISABEL A. RODRIGUEZ TOURS THE CHILE PEPPER INSTITUTE TO FIND THE HOTTEST OF THE HOT.



ere in Las Cruces, it might be a rarity to find someone who can't handle the heat packed in spicy foods, but that's exactly what

I am: a wimp when it comes to chile. As such, it might seem strange that I was eager to check out the goods produced by the Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University.

Established in 1992 by Professor Paul W. Bosland to answer questions about one of our most famous crops, the Institute is the only one of its kind in the entire world—which translated to me as something that should be on every New Mexican's bucket list. And although I was born in Texas, I'm a proud Aggie and consider myself an honorary Las Crucean.

The line of seeds and sauces are shipped across several states and countries, but a gift shop showcasing

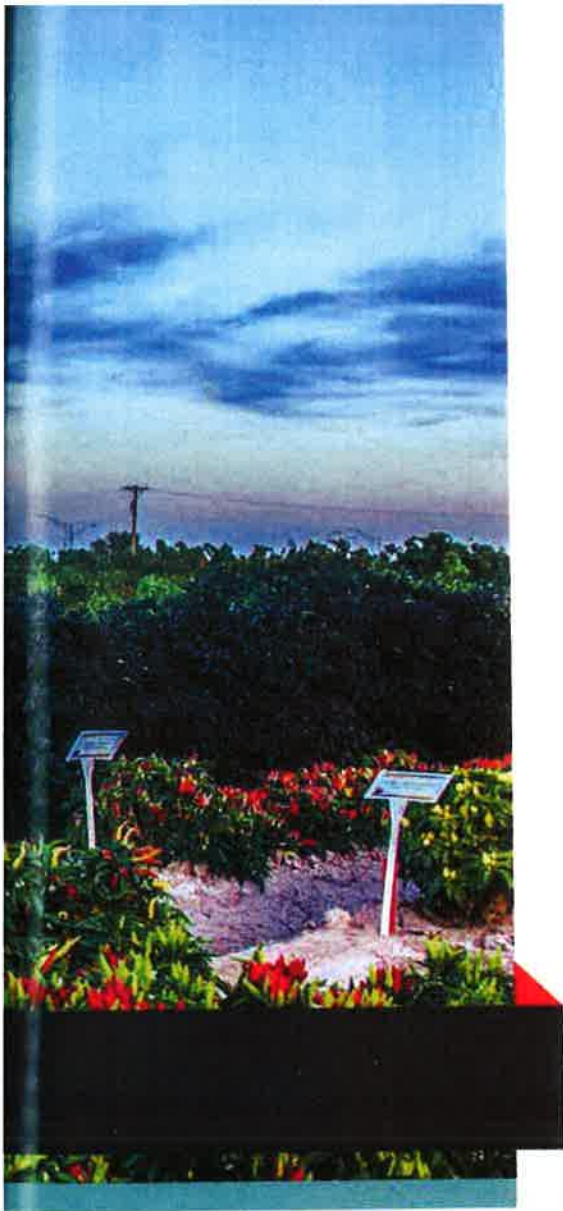
an array of items is located in Gerald Thomas Hall, Room 265, on the NMSU campus. There, customers will find dozens of seed packages of various varieties, ornamental plants, frozen green chile, and an assortment of rubs and sauces to delight both red and green enthusiasts. Fifty-two of the chile varieties were actually developed at the Institute.

On my visit to learn more about the products, the gift shop was bustling with activity, from customers looking for gifts for neighbors, to others interested in adding pepper plants to their own gardens. Danise Coon, program specialist, explained to me that the seeds are grown at the Fabian Garcia Science Center. The seeds, or sometimes the pods (fruits), are then sent to Hatch or Ohio, where the products are manufactured. Seeds range in flavors for consumers who want to add an ample kick to their meals to those that may be more faint of heart.

"We produce almost 3,000 pounds of seeds a year," Danise says. "Dr. Bosland has said that when he decided to start the Institute back in 1992, he never in his wildest dreams, thought it would become what it is today. He thought he'd be answering questions for others. It went above and beyond his expectations."

The gift shop is run by Adán Delval, a graduate of the program who grew up working in the fields. "My parents picked chile for a living," he says. "Growing up I decided that wasn't the profession I wanted. During my sophomore year of college, I was exposed to the other side of farm working: the breeding/research portion of it. I've always loved chile. That's what attracted me here."

Adán explained that in 1992, Bosland began selling seeds produced by the university as a means of generating extra revenue. Since then, it's become a booming business that raises funds for

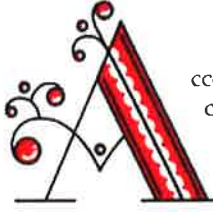


an endowed chair and student scholarships. When I asked why people are so enamored with foods that make your mouth feel like it's on fire, Adán replied that it's addictive. Danise likens the feeling to a runner's high. "When you eat chile peppers, the capsaicin hits the same receptors that go to your brain as fire and heat, so your body releases endorphins to kind of combat that. So when your body releases endorphins, you feel good. Anytime you eat chile, after a while, you feel really good," she notes with a laugh.

I couldn't leave the shop without purchasing a couple of products for the two biggest chile fans I know: my mom and my husband. I asked Adán to recommend the spiciest powder and sauce, and he wasted no time in picking out two products from the Holy Jolokia line. "In 2006, the Bhut Jolokia, also known as the 'Ghost Pepper,' was discovered to be the world's hottest pepper," he adds. "From there, Cajohns Fiery Foods Company developed one of our very first products, the hot sauce."



“DR. BOSLAND HAS SAID THAT WHEN HE DECIDED TO START THE INSTITUTE BACK IN 1992, HE NEVER IN HIS WILDEST DREAMS, THOUGHT IT WOULD BECOME WHAT IT IS TODAY.”



According to a label on the container, “the chile heat comes from Bhut Jolokia, a chile pepper from India tested by Dr. Bosland,

and measured at 1 million Scoville Heat Units. Your taste buds may cry out, ‘Holy Jolokia!’”

The sauce does not disappoint; just a small drop on a bite of food will have you working up a sweat, and the heat only intensifies as it’s going down.

Whether you want a chile pepper to make your taste buds explode with heat, or just one that will add a little more flavor to your meals, the Chile Pepper Institute and its staff can help you find something that’s just right for you. Adan also points out that items from the shop are often featured in gift baskets presented to performers at the Pan American Center. “We helped put together a gift basket for Carrie Underwood and Luke Bryan,” he says.

“Was he able to handle the heat?” I ask. “I don’t know,” he replies. “I’ll have to send him a Tweet and find out.” *

Chile Pepper Institute
 Gerald Thomas Hall 265, NMSU Campus
 575-646-3028
 :hilepepperinstitutue.org

Photo: Dr. Bosland