

**HARVEST SEASON**

# **Hatch Chile Store opens processing center in LC**



ROBIN ZIELINSKI - SUN-NEWS

**The Hatch Chile Store owner Elaine Mitchell takes early phone orders on Tuesday at the store.**

# Mitchells purchase Biad Chili online business to grow international reach

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**LAS CRUCES »** Preston Mitchell is sweating it a little bit this harvest season. But chile lovers will soon appreciate the fruits of his labors.

Mitchell, along with his wife, Elaine, own and operate The Hatch Chile Store. They recently purchased the fresh and frozen green chile and online sales portions of Biad Chili Products business.

Now, they are working feverishly to open a processing facility and storefront before the end of August, possibly by Aug. 18.

They are putting the final touches on their new 3920 W. Picacho Ave. location with Biad's hardware in place to roast, vacuum pack, freeze and ship Hatch green chile across the globe through their website which now includes Biad's former online business.

That may seem like a daunting challenge in a state where chile is big business.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 77,780 tons of New Mexico chile was harvested with a value of \$65,412,980 in 2012, the last year for which total sales were available.

At its peak in 1992 farmers harvested 34,500 acres of chile.

While that number dropped to under 9,000 acres in 2013, according to federal chile production numbers, it's not an overwhelming challenge to Mitchell, 23. He has been in

the chile business his whole life. In fact, it's in his blood.

Mitchell's great-grandfather, Joseph Franzoy immigrated from Spormingore, Italy, and is credited with being the first chile farmer in the Hatch Valley. His family continues to be involved in agriculture.

Mitchell entered the online sales business at age 13, after his grandparents had a poor year on their chile farm and he launched an online site to boost sales,

he said.

"My grandparents had some unfortunate events, crop failures," he said. "And I thought what could I do to help them get out the position they are in" he said. "I thought what the heck, let's try it."

His online sales with Hatch Chile Store and business has doubled each year over the past decade.

The Hatch Chile Store has served the online market for Hatch Chile for more

than 10 years and previously did business under the name Berridge Farms.

After finishing the 2013 season, the Mitchells decided to buy out his grandparents' farm and make a go of processing and sales.

"My wife and I graduated from NMSU. We thought about it and said let's buy them out," Mitchell said. "Then, this summer Chris Biad said he wanted to sell his fresh and frozen green chile business."

## GET YOUR FIX

Former online customers of Biad Chili Products can now order through [www.hatch-green-chile.com](http://www.hatch-green-chile.com) while residents and visitors to Las Cruces can visit the new location at 3920 W. Picacho Ave as well as online or by calling 575-635-4680.

good product. They are really sharp, energetic young people. I'm happy for them and excited to see what they do."

Mitchell's uncle will continue to provide 90 percent of the product from the family farm in Hatch. Other providers will ensure a wide range of offerings, including heritage varieties fostered at the New Mexico Chile Institute.

A portion of online sales will be donated to the institute.

"The consumer cares about flavor and you get that with smaller batches," Mitchell said. It's the farm-to-table movement, less processed. There is money to be made there and you are able to connect with the customer instead of a distributor."

"We are going to focus on retail," Mitchell said. The Biads "were wholesale. We are focusing on retail. One thing they did well was physical retail. We were online exclusively. We want to bring that product to Las Cruces and southern New Mexico."

Biad said he had been considering selling off the green chile and online portion of his business for some time and that the online sales had been growing at a rate his schedule made difficult to maintain.

"I'm 46. I've been doing it since I was a little boy," Biad said. "I had a feeling a couple of years ago. I think they will be able to carry out our long-term goals better than we were — providing good, high-quality service and a

Product will be processed in Las Cruces, vacuum sealed, frozen and shipped under new agreements with FedEx by ground with a two- to three-day turnaround. Once permitting on the new facility is complete, it will take about a week of running the facility to have