



# It's Chile Down There

New Mexico gets most of the attention when it comes to chile peppers. And rightfully so. The thing is, if it weren't for Ed Curry and his chile fields southeast of Tucson, New Mexico would be in a world of hurt. Turns out, Ed supplies 90 percent of the green chile seeds used in American agriculture.

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90% OF THE GREEN CHILE PEPPERS used in the U.S. food system originate in Ed Curry's fields southeast of Tucson, Arizona. In his farm near Phoenix, Ed Curry grows the chile seeds that produce agricultural

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THE SMILE OF SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA HANGS HEAVY IN THE FALL AIR OVER Ed Curry's fields. Dry, hot, but almost sweet in a way, the scent clings to your clothes, and later, to your memory. Down there in Pearce, 90 miles southeast of Tucson, Ed Curry grows chiles. And he does it well.

His fields are thick with plants — chiles hanging like bunches of bananas from the low branches. Tramping out there dressed in the colors of green leaves and red chiles, Curry gives a shout.

"You ain't seen nothin' yet," he promises.

That claim could send the players of the world's chile industry into a state of hypersalivation. That's because this farmer doesn't just grow chiles, he creates chiles to meet the needs of the international marketplace and the palates of its customers.

Want a mild chile? Need a chile with smooth skin? Want one with a distinct flavor? Call Ed down in Pearce.

"Anyone can do it," he says of the crossbreeding process necessary to produce a chile made to specifications. Then, he adds with a smile, "You need to live to be 150 years old to see the results."

Not quite, but it can take a lifetime of innovation out in the fields to earn the place where Curry now stands. According to the 2006 "Agricultural Experiment Station Research Report" from the University of Arizona, the Seed & Chile Company now supplies most of the seeds for the green chile business of the United States.

"We're about 90 percent of the industry," Curry humbly confirms. But that's not all. He also helps meet the country's growing demand for cayenne and paprika. That makes Curry and the Arizona chile industry one of the state's best-kept secrets.

Southeastern Graham and Cochise counties offer ideal conditions for growing chiles — endless sunshine, elevations higher than 4,000 feet and cool nights. But, when it comes to exercising bragging rights in the chile arena, Arizona's neighbor to the east gets most of the attention.

In New Mexico, folks have been extolling the virtues of their green chiles for decades. And with just cause. New Mexico ranks No. 1 in chile production, with 21,000 dedicated acres. By comparison, Arizona has about 7,000.

In Tempe, the annual Salsa Challenge, set for April 25, 2009, attracts tens of thousands of visitors. And the Tucson Firefighters Chili Cook-Off (not yet scheduled at press time) feeds 10,000 or more every year. But, it's the little

**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT** It can take a lifetime to produce high-quality, genetically designed chile seeds (below, left) that meet growers' needs.

**FOR SEEDS** Curry produced a chile variety known as Arizona 620 (below) that is prized for its consistent flavor and heat.

**MUCH TO ADMIRE** Curry inspects a field of another chile prior to harvest (right). Another size dried poblano chiles.



