

NMSU claims hottest chili pepper

By LEN RICHARDSON

PAUL Bosland exhaled after taking a bite of the world's hottest chili pepper; it felt like he was breathing fire.

"Got milk?" he thought. He was right; dairy products such as yogurt are the best cure following a chili burn.

The next thing Bosland thought, after gulping down a soda, was, "That chili has got to be some kind of record."

He was right again.

Key Points

- "Guinness World Records" confirms new hottest chili pepper.
- Bhut Jolokia has 1,001,304 Scoville heat units.
- Variety holds food industry potential as a seasoning.

In fall of 2006, "Guinness World Records" confirmed that Bosland, New Mexico State University Regent

professor, had indeed discovered the world's hottest chili pepper, Bhut Jolokia. At 1,001,304 Scoville heat units, it is nearly twice as hot as Red Savina, the chili pepper variety it replaces as the world's hottest.

A New Mexico green chile contains about 1,500 SHU, and an average jalapeno measures at about 10,000 SHU.

"The name Bhut Jolokia translates as 'ghost chile,'" Bosland says. "We're not sure why they call it that, but I think it's because the chile is so hot, you give up

the ghost when you eat it!"

According to Bosland, Bhut Jolokia is a naturally occurring interspecific hybrid indigenous to the Assam region of northeastern India. A member of NMSU's Chile Pepper Institute visiting India sent Bhut Jolokia seeds back to NMSU for testing in 2001.

Bosland then grew Bhut Jolokia, Red Savina and habanero peppers under controlled settings. Bhut Jolokia exhibited significantly higher SHU than the other varieties. These findings were confirmed by two independent labs.

Food additive potential

Bosland reports that the variety has compelling potential in the packaged-food industry as a food additive. The pepper could be pickled while still green, dehydrated and used as a seasoning. Because the heat is so concentrated, less would be needed and food manufacturers would save money.

"This isn't something you'd pickle whole and eat," Bosland says, "but it could replace dehydrated jalapeno as an additive."

Bhut Jolokia is not NMSU's first brush with chile greatness; the record holder for the world's largest chile pepper is a specimen of the "NuMex Big Jim" variety. The record holder was grown near Hatch, but the variety was developed at NMSU.

Bhut Jolokia seeds are available only through the NMSU Chile Pepper Institute. To order, call 505-646-3028.



RED-HOT: A Chile Pepper Institute member visiting Bhut Jolokia's native India sent seeds back to NMSU. "The plant doesn't set fruit very well, so it took a couple of years to get enough for field testing," says Paul Bosland.

Chilis cultivated 6,000 years ago

SMITHSONIAN researchers and colleagues report that across the Americas, chili peppers (*Capsicum* species) were cultivated and traded as early as 6,000 years ago — predating the invention of pottery in some areas. The researchers analyzed starch grains to trace the history of chili peppers in the Americas.

Lead author Linda Perry, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, and her colleagues first identified chili pepper starch grains. The starch microfossils were found at seven sites dating from 6,000 years ago to European contact and ranging from the Bahamas to southern Peru.

Cultivated chili starch grains are discernible from those of wild chilies. The remains of these domesticated peppers were often found with corn, forming part of a major, ancient food complex.

The oldest *Capsicum* starch grains were found in southwestern Ecuador at two sites dating to 6,100 years ago. The chili pepper remains were associated with previously identified corn.

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