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To put our salsafied taste buds to the test, and to take a peck at the newly designated “world’s hottest pepper” – Bhut Jolokia from northeaster India – *Local iQ* raced to the 20th annual Fiery Foods and Barbecue Show, which took place at Sandia Resort and Casino from February 29 to March 2.



Bhut Jolokia Peppers

**Our consensus on the Jolokia? With almost a million Scoville Heat Units (SHU – the official unit that measures the amount of capsaicin in a pepper), we discovered that yes, it does trump the heat of the former chile champ Red Savina (350,000 – 577,000 SHU’s; New Mexico green and red chile register an SHU of just 1,000), as the king of fire, a title that was endorsed in 2006 by Guinness World Records.**

**Shortly after our arrival to the highly anticipated festival, we sampled hot sauce maker CaJohn’s latest and hottest Jolokia concoction, as served on the tip of a toothpick – a sampling rule for sauces deemed “superhot”. In just a few short seconds, the walls seemingly began to move in true psychedelic fashion. Fifteen minutes and buckets of tears later, we were able to continue.**

**Touring through the hundreds of spicy food vendor booths that sell their wares every year at the popular industry trade show, it became apparent that the Jolokia was the new star of the hot sauce world. Though the pepper was discovered only a couple of years ago, numerous hot sauce makers had already cranked out their own interpretations of the Indian tear-jerker and had them brazenly displayed and read to sear any tongue that dared a taste.**

**In a word, the Jolokia is hot in so many ways, but with all the excitement around the new kid in town, the thousands of spicy delights laid out before us couldn't be forsaken.**

**With countless New Mexico vendors on hand, such as El Pinto, Cervantes, El Rancho, De Los Garcias and Apple Canyon Gourmet Foods among others, the home team was well-represented. We soon found out the really hot stuff comes from such unlikely paces as Ohio and Jersey, the latter of which is home to Blair's Sauces and Snacks. The Highlands, NJ-based company showed up to the show boasting its award-winning "Heat" and "Death" lines, as well as its new Jolokia spread that was very tasty.**

**We also discovered a mustard vendor who explained his process for coaxing out the mustard seed's "sinigrin" – the same pungent element responsible for the spice in horseradish – to make his hot mustards. Melanie Unk, owner of Melanie's Fine Foods in San Carlos, California, let us try her sweet, earthy mole, which she described as a "labor of love". And if every bartender made their Bloody Marys with Danny Cash's Jolokia Bloody Mary shooter mix, I'd never have to ask for extra spicy again. St. Croix's Crucian Sauces admitted the secret to their successful roster of sauces: 100 year old Habanero recipes. Regardless of the habanero's recent drop in rank, the Crucian booth provided the hottest taste this writer had all day, beating out any of the Jolokia wonders I had tasted earlier.**

**Other show favorites include the apple-infused barbecue sauce line of Washington State's "Frawg N Turtle", spicy HR pickles and Peppers, Simmie J's signature barbecue sauce, a couple of spicy hams, including local grower and jammer Heidi Eleftheriou's Heidi's Raspberry Organic Farm and a number of wine jellies (especially the pinot noir and the tequila-chardonay jalapeno) from the Betca Sisters in Mesa, Arizona.**

**And though the festival is always rife with local brave hearts who seek a real challenge, after years of tempering their taste buds in New Mexico, at the heart of the festival are hot sauce veterans who know that taste always beats heat. This philosophy was best summed up by the folks at the Connecticut based company "**Sweet Sunshine**" by Gourmet Conveniences, Ltd., whose motto is "**Flavor before Fire**". Their lineup of six well-balanced sauces ran the gamut from sweet to searing.**

**"We attend food show throughout the year, but we always look forward to the Fiery Foods Show", said Ed Fedorovich, Sales Associate, for the quickly expanding company.**

**Our sentiments exactly.**