

# Denver Mayor Sparks Super Bowl Chile Battle



In this July 31, 2013 image, a collection of bumper stickers and buttons promoting New Mexico-grown chile sits on the order counter at Hello Deli restaurant in Albuquerque, N.M. A friendly Super Bowl bet between the mayors of Seattle and Denver has created a stir this week in New Mexico, re-energized efforts to promote the state's famous hot peppers. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A friendly Super Bowl bet between the mayors of Seattle and Denver is causing a stir in New Mexico.

If the Seahawks win Sunday, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock has wagered a few things he says are indicative of his city. Among them: handmade skis, a hoodie and a sampling of Denver's "amazing green chile."

Chile from the Mile High City?

The question has fired up New Mexicans, resulting in a flurry of social media posts on New Mexico's long history with the hot peppers.

Chile is the state vegetable and the basis of the official state question — "Red or green?" A state law even has been passed to protect the spicy reputation of New Mexico peppers by targeting impostors everywhere from roadside stands to grocery stores.

"We are the chile state," declared Katie Goetz, a spokeswoman for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.

To help set the record straight, department officials aren't waiting for the outcome of Sunday's matchup between the Broncos and Seahawks. They're sending care packages with 20 pounds of frozen green chiles, aprons, hats and recipes to

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Hancock and Seattle Mayor Ed Murray.

Hancock announced this week he would be wagering a sampling of green chile from a half-dozen local restaurants. There are some chile farms north of Denver and near Pueblo, but many Denver restaurants source their peppers straight from New Mexico, which pumps out more than 60,000 tons of green chile every year.

"The flavor of New Mexico green chile is just unique, and nobody else can even come close to delivering that kind of flavor," said Jaye Hawkins of the New Mexico Chile Association. "I'm assuming that's what the folks in Colorado love about it."

When it comes to green chile, Gov. Susana Martinez said Thursday there's no question it's synonymous with New Mexico.

"Although New Mexico doesn't have an NFL team, we definitely win the Super Bowl of green chile every single year," the governor said. "Our green chile, whether from Hatch or Chimayo or anywhere else in the state, is our state's Lombardi Trophy."

Chile is a sacred crop in New Mexico. For neighbors to the north, it has become a culinary pursuit.

"If you're a Denver native, you'll know all too well of the green chile culture here," said Amber Miller, a spokeswoman for the mayor. "People put it on everything, and then you can even eat it straight up as soup. We have chile cook-offs."

It's not so different in Denver come late summer, when the sweet smell of roasting green chile permeates the air outside some grocery stores and markets, Miller said.

"New Mexico and Colorado do share in two major items here — a love of our green chile and a love of the Denver Broncos," she said.

And for the Broncos, green chile has become somewhat of a good luck charm. Hancock first wagered it for the AFC title game and again during the playoffs.

"We've just kept it on the table so hopefully it will take us through to a Super Bowl championship," Miller said.

If not, New Mexicans say they're ready to help Hancock make good on his wager with some authentic green chile.

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