

Green chile takes hot ride into space

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LAS CRUCES, NM (KRQE) - Some New Mexico green chile is headed for a roasting in outer space. It is part of an experiment on a NASA-funded educational rocket set to blast off this Friday, May 20 at Spaceport America near Truth or Consequences.

During its fiery-hot ride, the green chile will be joined by 26 other experiments devised by New Mexico, Texas and Arizona grade school and college students.

The green chile experiment was designed and built by high school and mid-school students from Aztec, N.M. They labored in a classroom for several months, toiling over many different kinds of complicated parts for a space capsule.

Aztec High student Ariana Dimas said the payload was a natural for a New Mexico school.

"New Mexico is known for chile," she said. "We thought it would be kinda cool to just send one up and try and roast it."

"But it's gonna be itty-bitty too," she noted. The tiny slice is only about the size of a few grains of rice.

Building the experiment required learning all kinds of things. Piezoelectric power, generated by the g-forces of the rocket and stored in capacitors will be used to heat a tiny oven. A zero-gravity switch turns the oven on in space.

As one of 27 schools that won a NASA competition to fly experiments in space, sponsors say students get to learn about science by 'doing' it. NASA hopes they may get attracted to a career in it.

Aztec High science teacher Reggie Bell thinks the students who participate in the spaceflight program will look harder at science-related careers.

"When we can bring these kinds of activities and this type of group together, maybe it gives them more of the view of what's out there," he said.

Meanwhile, students from Albuquerque's Desert Ridge Middle School students will launch a magnetometer to measure the earth's magnetic field.

Desert Ridge student Corey Devenport says, "We'll be able to see some patterns in the magnetosphere. See how much voltage we get from the voltmeter."

After assembly of all of the experiments at the different schools was completed, they were shipped to a small building at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. There, technicians stowed the experiments in tube-shaped metal cannisters for the spaceflight.

The NMSU building is the home of the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium, which raises the money to pay for the rocket flights which the staff hopes in turn, will make science more relevant to students who participate.

NMSGC Director Pat Hynes says the opportunity the spaceflights provide to students cultivates not only an interest in science, but also affects them on many personal levels.

"I've changed their lives," Hynes said. "I've changed their behavior. I've changed the way they think. I've changed what they do during their day."

The UP Aerospace SL-5 rocket is scheduled to launch at 7 a.m. MDT. Pre-launch and launch coverage can be viewed on www.krqe.com beginning at 6 a.m.