

interview with **márk** **bogár** hungarian chili farmer

by Maja Tiborszky



VIBES: First and foremost: congratulations to you and the whole Sárréti Chilifarm team for winning the first prize* with your BBQ sauce at a prestigious chili competition that was recently organized by Chile Pepper Magazine/McAby Media! Tell us a bit about your background. When and how did it all start to happen?

Márk: That's really kind of you thank you very much. The story started back in 2012, when some friends of my Dad's brought him some Habanero chili peppers from the US as a surprise present. As a matter of fact Dad has always had a reputation for being a great fan of chili peppers and hot food, so his buddies figured that some Habaneros which were considered as one of the strongest chili

pepper types back in those days would shut him up and leave him gasping for air. In a certain sense they did manage to surprise him: he was fascinated by its strength but he was even more astonished by the powerful taste. The divine spark came almost immediately after tasting the spicy present: there are lots of tiny chili pepper seeds inside, so why don't we try to plant them? My Dad is originally a plumber but he is also a licensed gas and heating technician which means that he is basically pretty good at various trades and crafts as a handyman. He used to be in charge of maintenance at the local school. In a family of five money has always played an important role so our parents were thinking about some kind of additional business that

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might generate some extra money. My grandparents used to grow vegetables, so my parents knew the basics, but they did not want to follow the old routine, selling peppers, onions or cabbages at the local markets. Those things are actually disappearing anyway, thanks to the multinational companies. That is the brief story of how the production of our chili peppers started, and you should know that it was something quite unique in our small country in those days.

VIBES: What kinds of chili species do you grow on your farm? Which one is the hottest and chilliest? (How many SHU on the Scoville scale?) Do you have a personal favourite?

Márk: Now that's a tough one but I will try to list our chili peppers by order of strength. You can find at our chili farm 2 types of the famous Jalapeno chili pepper: the Mucho Nacho and the TAM. We grow classical Hungarian chili peppers as well (in the common language they are referred to as "kutyafasza" (dog's prick) or "macskapöcse" (cat's prick) chili peppers. We have Cayenne chili (not to be confused with cayenne pepper which may be a blend of different types of peppers, quite often not containing cayenne peppers, and may or may not contain the seeds. – Vibes), we cultivate Penis pepper, Bird's Eye Chili, Habanero Peach, Red Savina Habanero, Chocolate Habanero, red and yellow Bhut jolokia chili pepper (also known as ghost pepper, ghost chili – Vibes), Trinidad Scorpion chili, Trinidad MORUGA Scorpion Chili, 7 pot Brown and last but not least the hottest chili on the planet, the actual word recorder: Carolina Reaper chili pepper which has been measured on the Scoville Scale as high as 2.1 million SHU. That's insanely hot...

If you ask me about my personal favorite than I would definitely choose the Jalapeno, because it's fit for human consumption, basically anybody can eat it, I like its crunchiness, its thick flesh, not to mention its amazing taste. My other favourite is Habanero Peach Chili pepper which has a very strong taste and aroma; when you cut it or take a bite, you suddenly feel a fruity sensation



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It has a really special taste, a bit sweet, I wouldn't say that it has a killing strength, I would rather call it a female fighter, it's a very sophisticated chili pepper.

VIBES: Could you give us a little insight into the process of growing chili peppers? Do they grow in the wintertime as well? How long does it take to grow a chilli? Are you physically participating in the production of chili peppers?

Márk: Every single aspect of the business is carried out and controlled by our family. We guarantee everything from the cultivation of the soil through plant protection, harvesting, processing, marketing plus image creation including even the label design. There are already three employees who help in the garden. Honestly it's a heartwarming feeling that in such a disadvantaged small village as Tetétlen, where there are only 1300 inhabitants, we are able to help three other families, offering them competitive salaries, a family atmosphere and decent work. In a few words the cultivation process looks like this: in January we decide the types of chili peppers we want to grow in the given year; we usually add some new species to the list of the already mentioned types, but never more than 2 types. 80% of the seeds are from our own stock but each year we order fresh

"virgin" seeds from reliable sources such as pepperseeds.eu or M-garden. The sowing of the seeds usually starts in February and ends by the middle of March. We provide extra protection by nurturing the seeds in double walled foil tents that are dug into the ground. We provide them with adequate lighting, temperature, ventilation and of course love until early May which is known in Hungary as "the days of the Ice Saints". At that point in time the chili pepper plants are moved into the foil tents on the field and then the will continue their life cycle as open air crops. By the 20th of August we are usually ready to bring our fresh chilies to the markets, fairs and festivals.

VIBES: What are the top 5 benefits of eating chili peppers? Do you think that some species are really healthier than others?

Márk: I don't think that one chili pepper is healthier than the other. I would rather mention the subjective perception. While you might eat a Carolina Reaper the strength of which is basically equivalent to the American standard of tear gas without any problem, others would give up by a Jalapeno chili pepper which is located at the bottom of the Scoville scale. In this aspect health does come to the picture, everything depends

on how much one can bear the heat, how much a person is used to eat hot chili pepper. Graduation and moderation is always recommended when eating chili peppers! Like to anything else, you can get used to the heat as well, capsaicin is physically addictive because it produces endorphin in our mind that's the reason that after eating chili pepper you will always long for it, your brain will seek that euphoria and feeling again and again.

I can tell you from my own experience, that eating more chili peppers than I normally do always helps me when I catch a cold or have flu. Chili has an antibacterial effect due to its main component: the capsaicin. Before starting our chili business my mother used to suffer from asthma, she used an inhaler, pipe etc., everything that could ease the symptoms a bit. It's such a frustrating illness. Ever since we've been working with chili and in the harvest season she is cooking approximately 2-300 kgs of chili sauce and cream weekly, her asthma just disappeared. Well, we can't prove it scientifically, but this is what happened in the real life! I would like to add to the benefits the flavor of the chili pepper, I think they can really give a twist to our dishes and bring such a characteristic taste that can work miracles with even a simple scrambled egg.

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VIBES: What are some of your personal favourite ways of cooking with chili peppers? Do you have any favourite recipes that you would like to share with us?

Márk: Oh well, my favourite chili meals are Chili chicken wings and Jalapeno poppers, the way my mother prepares them! On this link you can find the recipe they prepared together with Marcsi Borbás the well-known Hungarian culinary expert: <https://gasztroangyal.hu/receptek/csipos-csirkeszarnyal>

VIBES: What do you enjoy most about your job?

Márk: Responsibility! It is really interesting to create something new and then taking it to a higher level. My parents managed to create the foundations of a business that is among the very first of its kind in Hungary! It's like paddling in a small but safe boat. First, you start alone with only one oar, then you will have another oar, then a bigger boat with a sail and a mast, with a proper boat deck, and a ship rudder. You are the one who determines the direction where you want to go, you decide, and your boat is not exposed to the wind. The little boat represents our business venture. :) I really like my job because I can implement my ideas. I love the fact that you need to be good at everything, and you must always be up to date in tendencies and trends. I love the fact that we managed to create a likeable image, we transposed it onto and into the jars, and we built an online community, and we earned quality relationships. Never settle, you should never be satisfied with your current knowledge! As Steve Jobs said: "Stay hungry, stay foolish"! There are, of course, more difficult, more challenging times, but without all that, it would be too easy. I made the right decision when I opted for starting this family business instead of sports!

VIBES: What is the most challenging part of your job?

Márk: The most challenging part is definitely the online media. We need to constantly work on our Facebook page, to always keep the activity of our groups, to provide quality content and quality photos on Instagram as well, and beside all that I run a blog which is published regularly on Index2, an online daily news magazine. But the greatest of all the challenges is to find the adequate workforce...



VIBES: I'm sure each chilli pepper harvest has its own story to tell. Can you recall a harvest that turned out to be very special for you? What's the story behind it?

Márk: Of course there are lots of stories to tell. At one point in time I wanted to start hydroponic cultivation but it didn't work out. For me it will always be something to remember because even today I simply do not know enough about how one could be successful in the area of cultivation without soil. Well, I guess I will not have the opportunity or the time for experimenting; I just do not see myself testing various options in the summer. Which means that next year we will be planting strawberries because that plant is less demanding than chili.

VIBES: What is your explanation of the outstanding success of Sárreți Chilifarm? What is your secret?

Márk: What people see on the jars and what they get in the jar is a taste or a teaser from the Bogár family. We do not want to force compliance with the standards of anyone, we provide the true values of the family to everyone. Humour, caring and love. Simply the essence of the Bogár Family that we really are. My Mom adds the harmony, my Dad blends in the strength and humour, I add the boldness and daring of the new generation, and my little brother adds his childish naivety that we can redeem the world with our sauces.

VIBES: What are your future plans? Any experiments?

Márk: I would like to organize hot chili eating contests at more and more university events, it's really great fun! I also have plans to visit secondary schools and high schools, to hold some kind of informal presentations to the students instead of a boring discussion class with the form master about the importance of studying; I want to tell my audience that it is really worth to study and it doesn't matter if people say that it is

embarrassing and it's not trendy. I want to talk about my experiences, my adventures, my background; I would like to give young people a kind of positive example. Oh yeah and I definitely want to be in Forbes. As regards my products, my aim is to design and produce sauces that would shock our consumers in a good sense; One good example is our latest creation, the LEVENDULATION chili sauce which is based on Sass Dani's recipe. Together with Dani we have already been holding hot chilli eating competitions, where contestants were heroically fighting against time, chili power and quantity. Our competitions are always crazy and they are just great! In addition, our family business works with several well-known Hungarian chefs and restaurant owners and humorists (including Dániel Balogh, Lázár Kovács, Dani Sass, Feri Rákóczi, István Dombóvári, István Bellus, Barnabás Lorán and Szabyest), as well as gastronomic events, road shows and team building events.

VIBES: Have you ever been to Mexico which is allegedly the home of all chili peppers?

Márk: No, unfortunately I have never had the opportunity, not yet, anyway. But I do hope that over a certain period of time I will be able to build such a strong personal brand that even MasterCard will be happy to sponsor me with such a trip :)



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VIBES: What is your best advice to other chili farmers?

Márk: If they have any questions they should contact me immediately without hesitation! They should always experiment, listen, learn and enjoy the moments of the plant but they should always avoid forcing nature! There is a time to everything, patience is very important!

VIBES: Where can VIBES readers reach you in case they want to purchase or taste your products?

Márk: You can purchase our products online by navigating to www.chilifarm.hu You can find all the novelties and our latest news on our Facebook page, and for everything else there is my Instagram page – if you understand what I mean, ladies ;)

VIBES: Thank you Márk!

About the prize: In the United States at a prestigious competition organized by Chile Pepper Magazine/McAby Media a whiskey based barbaque sauce under the name of traBBQ the co-produced "child" of the Sárréti Chilifarm and Dániel Balogh (W35, Revolución Budapest): was awarded first prize. The name is the invention of its „godfather”, Tamás Lorán (a.k.a. TRAbarna) who is a well known character from Showder Klub and the world or stand up comedy. The Hungarian first prize is a sensational success also because the competitors included such names as the PuckerButt Company, whose founder is Ed Curry, who is currently the breeder of the world's most powerful chili pepper, the Carolina Reaper. Among the categories, Sárréti Chilifarm won the first place in the category of "Alcoholic BBQ sauce", leaving several international chilli producers behind in the competition.

