



CHEESE MATTERS

NEW ZEALAND SPECIALIST CHEESEMAKERS ASSOCIATION INC.
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Message from the chairman

Hi all and welcome to this issue of Cheese Matters.

Firstly, congratulations to all who took home medals and trophies at this year's NZ Champions of Cheese awards, well done! The 2017 awards did see some significant changes from previous years as both the judging and gala dinner venues had changed, which made for some additional challenges for organisers, stewards and judges who had to adapt to the new setup. It was reported that the Judging venue was successful. Overall I am happy with feedback from members and sponsors and the publicity achieved to date.

This year's AGM was also attended by more than last year's, and it was great to see more members and individuals being involved and interested. This year we had two board positions open for election and they were filled by Diana Hawkins (re-elected) and Franco Sessa. It must be noted Franco Sessa and Paul Broughton achieved equal votes and thereafter Paul Broughton had opted to stand down to let Franco take the board position.

I would like to welcome Diana Hawkins and Franco Sessa to the board.

Moving forward, the NZSCA board will continue to make changes to ensure NZSCA financial viability but will also work harder to better represent all of our members. With large diversity among members it is difficult but part of the challenge we face.

Regulation is always an area of ongoing activity. The often the unseen actions of the board don't get recognised as much as other activities, but are still a large part of our responsibilities.

As always, I encourage you to get in touch with any of us on the board so we can make better and informed decisions.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Cheese Matters and don't forget to share this with your industry and staff.

Regards, Miel

Double dutch at NZ Champions of Cheese Awards



Two New Zealand cheesemakers of Dutch origin have stepped outside their traditions with two new cheeses that have claimed the top prizes at the 2017 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards.

The Smoked Goat Gouda by Meyer Gouda Cheese was judged as the Countdown Champion of Champions (Commercial), and Fifty Fifty by Mercer Cheese was awarded as the Puhoi Valley Champion of Champions (Artisan).

Both Meyer Gouda Cheese and Mercer Cheese are from Waikato and both have won top honours in the past with traditional Dutch style cheeses. This year it is their innovation with new cheeses that has set them apart from the hundreds of entries submitted for judging.

Both the Champion of Champions cheeses were gold medallists in the Ministry for Primary Industries New Cheese category.

The best New Zealand cheeses were judged by an unprecedented contingent of 34 international and local cheese experts, from more than 370 entries. The twenty-one category winners were announced at a gala dinner at the NZ Champions of Cheese Awards, held at the Grand Millennium in Auckland on Tuesday 14 March, following a two-day cheese competition.

Master Judge and Australian cheese guru Russell Smith, says "Dutch Kiwis have a growing reputation for making inspirational cheeses with New Zealand milks. The 2017 champions are great examples of this expertise."

"The Smoked Goat Gouda by Meyer Gouda Cheese is an absolutely gorgeous goat cheese, and a pleasure to eat," Smith says of the Countdown Champion of Champions (Commercial) cheese winner.

"It has a smooth creamy texture that delights the palate with sweet and mild piquant flavours," he adds.

Smith was also clearly impressed with Fifty Fifty by Mercer Cheese, describing it as "a beautifully aged gouda, with complex sweet and savoury flavours coming from the combination of cow and goat milk."



The Countdown Team with members of the Meyer family

A rare cheese, Mercer Cheese only makes it on occasional years when the last of the summer milks are right for this type of Gouda to be produced, and then aged.

2017 was notable for the inclusion of three new cheese companies entering into the awards, including Winsam Farm. This new player to the cheese scene produced an incredible feat, scoring a perfect 100 for their Just Ewe Winsam Farmhouse cheese. The result lead its cheesemaker Catherine Oakley of Winsam Farm to be named the Cheesemaker Of The Year (Milk Test NZ Champion Cheesemaker), with her first ever entry.

Just Ewe Winsam Farmhouse was also the NZ Chefs Association Champion Sheep Cheese. Russell Smith described the outstanding cheese as "a semi hard sheep cheese with a delightful texture and feel in the mouth. It's delicate savoury and mildly spicy flavours finish off this delightful newcomer to the New Zealand cheese scene."

While new cheeses dominated the top three prizes of the night, 2017 saw a popular Kiwi blue cheese take out a number of categories. Kapiti Kikorangi from Fonterra Brands NZ won the Ecolab Champion Blue Cheese Award, the Renco New Zealand Export Cheese Award and Fonterra Champion Original Cheese Award.

Officially the most decorated blue cheese in Awards history, Kapiti Kikorangi was described by judges as a truly exceptional and distinctive cheese. "The very seductive creamy texture of this cheese is combined with sweet, spicy blue flavours," Smith says.

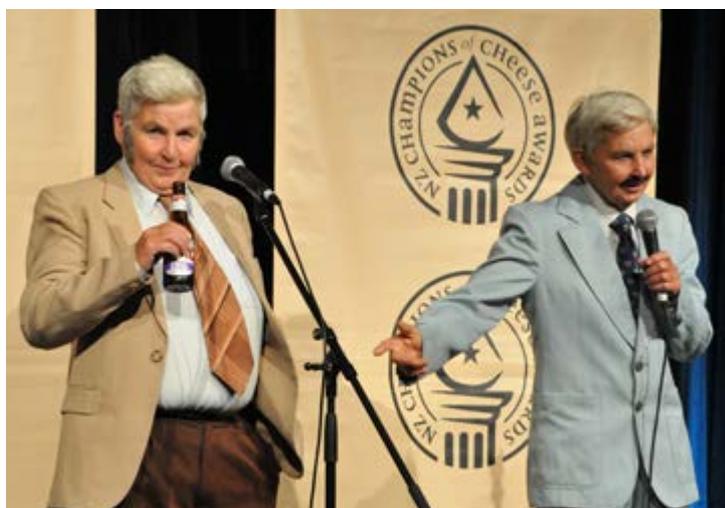
Another Kapiti blue also secured the public vote once again, to win the New World Champion Favourite Cheese Award – a competition where New World shoppers had the opportunity to judge their personal favourite. The Kapiti Kahurangi Creamy Blue from Fonterra Brands NZ proved the winner for the second year running in the public vote, owing to its delightfully smooth texture, delicate blue veining, and mild savoury flavour.

"The people have spoken," Smith said, commenting on the developing sophistication of New Zealanders' palate in selecting such a full favoured cheese as their favourite.

Another notable win from a classic Kiwi cheesemaker, Puhoi Valley Cheese, was the Puhoi Valley Feta which was awarded the Kiwi Labels Champion Feta Cheese Award. Puhoi Valley Cheese also went home with the Thermaflo Champion Washed Rind Cheese Award with the Puhoi Valley Cellar Range Washed Rind. Three of the four golds awarded to washed rind cheeses went to Puhoi Valley Cheese.

Now in its 14th year, the NZ Champions of Cheese Awards are held annually by the NZ Specialist Cheesemakers Association, to honour excellence in cheese making.

A full list of all Award winners and medallists is available at cheeselovers.co.nz



Melanie Bayes (Goodman Fielder) with winner Albert Alferink (Mercer Cheese)



Master Judge Commentary 2017 – Russell Smith

As usual it was my pleasure to be involved with the New Zealand Champions of Cheese Awards which is by far the most important event on the New Zealand cheese calendar.

There were a few significant milestones this year. One being the inclusion of six international judges on our judging panels. I feel this really does bring a new level of credibility to our judging and awards and it is indeed very pleasing to see the level of interest shown by this group of experts from Australia, England, Switzerland and the United States. Hopefully in future years we will see continuing interest from judges from these and other countries.

After many years at the Langham Hotel the judging shifted to a new venue, the Foodbowl at Mangere. A new judging venue always creates new challenges and it's pleasing to say both the Goode PR team and the NZSCA teams of stewards were up to the task and the judging day ran very smoothly. A contributing factor to the efficient running of the judging day is the improved level of data entry and scrutiny that has evolved over the last couple of years, thanks mainly to the efforts of Dianne Kenderdine.

Many of the local as well as all the international judges commented on how well the competition was organised. A great team effort and a big thank you to all those involved.

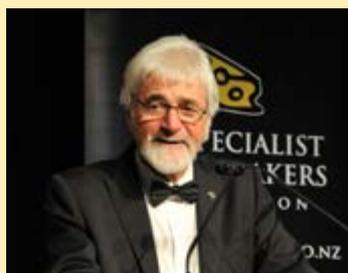
We did see less gold medals awarded this year and in part this was due to some very dry conditions in some regions over the summer months.

Also contributing to the lower gold medal count was some tough scoring by the judging panels. Partly this was led by the international judges who I feel brought an increased level of rigor to the judging and this did have a flow on effect for local judges. All in all not a bad thing as it just raises the bar for future years.

Well done to all those manufacturers who entered the competition. There were many exceptional products exhibited and it's pleasing to see the continuing development of new entries in previously under represented classes. The classes that really stood out as big improvers were the Italian styles and very pleasing to say the white mould classes also.

I look forward to what new and improved products the 2018 competition will bring.

Regards, Russell Smith
Master Judge.



International Judges

2017 saw more international judges than ever before. Here's a list of those involved from Australia, UK, Switzerland and the USA.

Cathy Strange, USA
Philp Tatzenko, Australia
Scott Bolch, Australia
Lassa Skinner, USA
Craig Gile, USA
Rachael Sils, Switzerland
Roland Sahli, Switzerland
Clare Fergusson, UK

New NZ Cheese companies

It's a positive sign of a healthy industry when new companies are created and are growing. Here's three new entrants in this year's awards:



Winsam Farm – Catherine Oakley

Cheesemaker Catherine Oakley of Winsam Farm, Kerikeri was named 2017 NZ Cheesemaker of The Year. Oakley's sheep's milk cheese, Just Ewe Winsam "Farmhouse" achieved the only perfect score out of over 370 New Zealand cheeses entered in this year's awards.

What's more, it was Oakley's first time entering the NZ Champions of Cheese awards at all with her distinctive sheep's milk cheeses.

Because the Winsam "Farmhouse" scored a perfect 100, the cheese was not only the Champion Sheep Cheese, but meant cheesemaker Catherine Oakley was awarded the coveted Cheesemaker of the year title.

"I'm elated to have won," Oakley said of the unexpected accolade. But she doesn't take all the credit for creating this amazing cheese.

"First and foremost, I would like to thank my ewes."

With milk from her own East Friesian ewes, Oakley makes cheeses including cheddar, farmhouse and feta –at the small Just Ewe cheese operation at Winsam Farm.

"I just hope this win will help put New Zealand sheep's milk on the map," Oakley said.

Catherine and her husband Rod Clarke work as a team on their Bay of Islands farm. Rod – a born and bred farmer – milks the sheep, then Catherine makes the cheese.

Following a 1-year trial of Catherine making sheep cheeses in the kitchen, Rod realised his wife was on to a good thing and build her a cheese room right on the farm.

"Five years on I'm still learning, and always trying to improve the final product."

Her number one fan, Rod is proud of the Just Ewe success, in their first ever awards entry.

"I'm over the moon, particularly for Cathy."

"We couldn't have come this far without each other, and of course our supporters," he adds.

"Our current stockists at The Dairy (Ponsonby, Auckland) have been very supportive, as have restaurants around Kerikeri, and our local community through farm sales."

As well as a gold medal and top score for the Just Ewe Winsam "Farmhouse", the new cheesemaker on the scene won a bronze medal for Just Ewe Winsam Cheddar.

2017 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards for Winsam Farm:

- Catherine Oakley – Cheesemaker of the year - Milk Test NZ Champion Cheesemaker Award
- Just Ewe Winsam Farmhouse – Champion Sheep Cheese & GOLD medallist - NZ Chefs Association Champion Sheep Cheese Award
- Just Ewe Winsam Farm Cheddar – BRONZE in Tetra Pak Champion Cheddar Cheese Award

Thorvald – David Barrett

Just three months following the launch of Thorvald's first ever cheese, the small NZ sheep's milk cheese company has already achieved gold medal status in the 2017 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards with their Curado.

Thorvald is named after owner David Barrett's late father – a cheesemaker himself originally from Denmark.

Barrett has a strong connection to his Danish heritage, but his foray into the cheese business wasn't a traditional one.

"It's hard to believe but I didn't actually like cheese as a kid; it wasn't until in later life that I got into cheese."

Now running his own cheese company near Motueka, Barrett was thrilled to have made a mark so soon, in his father's name.

"Receiving these medals on our first attempt is incredibly special and I know Mum & Dad would have been proud."

It was a chance meeting with French cheesemaker Francis Bigot that led Barrett to take the plunge. Barrett attributes the success of Thorvald's award entries to the young and talented cheesemaker.

The two met in 2015, and now are working together to make some of New Zealand's best cheese.

"This is the first time Francis has worked with sheep's milk, and he's done amazingly well in a short amount of time," Barrett said.

While Bigot has years of experience making cheese in France and countries around the world, he had never worked with sheep's cheese until Barrett brought him on as cheesemaker for his new venture, working closely with shepherd Julie Brownlee.

"Julie puts hard work in every day to get her 'girls' producing top quality milk," Barrett says of Brownlee, whose herd supply the sheep's milk directly to the Thorvald factory.

"We work on the basis that if our sheep are content, they make better cheese; which is better for everybody."

Thorvald hand craft sheep milk cheese including blue vein and white vein, Greek-style feta, Curado (Manchego style) and camembert. The company also produce excellent sheep's milk yoghurt, which achieved a bronze medal in this year's NZ Champions of Cheese Awards.

2017 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards for Thorvald:

- Thorvald Curado – GOLD in NZ Chefs Association Champion Sheep Cheese Award
- Thorvald Sheep Milk Yoghurt – BRONZE in Epic Beer Champion Yoghurt Award
- Thorvald Camembert – BRONZE in CHR Hansen Champion Soft White Rind Award

Viavio

First-time entry into the NZ Champions of Cheese Awards, Nelson-based cheese company Viavio achieved a gold medal in the Washed Rind Cheese category with their Italian-style Fontal.

Husband and wife Flavia Spena and Flavio Donati decided they were ready to enter the awards this year; their second year in the business of cheese in New Zealand. Their company Viavio is an amalgamation of their names, Flavia and Flavio.

The Italian couple have spent time in New Zealand on and off over the years, but could never find the kinds of cheeses they had at home.

When they decided to change pace from their corporate lifestyles, they came to New Zealand and searched the country to find the right place to make cheese.

"We chose Nelson so we can work with nearby Oaklands Farm who supply us A2 milk," Flavia says.

Saturday mornings are spent at the Nelson markets, showcasing their cheeses and connecting with customers.

"We want to educate Kiwis on Italian cheese and the wonderful things you can do with it, so a relationship with our customers is very important to us."

Flavia and Flavio still spend time in Italy each year, researching and learning what they can about Italian cheese in their home country, as well as sourcing equipment for their small operation.

They pride themselves on their classic Italian passion for quality food and the cheeses they are now making in New Zealand from great milk, which aims to bring Italian and New Zealand food together to create something different.

"Our purpose at Viavio is to make the best Italian style cheeses, using quality, natural milk from healthy animals reared on beautiful New Zealand land."

"We love bringing the beauty of handmade Italian cheese to a country we love."

The Viavio team were pleasantly surprised to celebrate three medal wins in the NZ Champions of Cheese Awards, all with Italian-style cheeses made from local milk.

"We had no expectations going into the awards, and we didn't quite believe it when we found out we had won medals."

"We're just at the beginning of our venture and we will always have aspirations to do better and better. It's amazing to receive early recognition for our team who work hard every day to make something special."

"Everybody did their part but we ultimately have our cheesemaker Ermanno Bodeo to thank for bringing our passion to life."

Bodeo obtained 35 years' experience in Italy making cheese, before coming to New Zealand to make Italian style cheeses for Viavio.

Viavio products include fontal, biancolite, bocconcini, scamorza, mozzarella, gorgonzola, stracchino, monello, ricotta, burrata, and caciocavallo. All of the products are preservative free.

2017 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards for Viavio:

- Viavio Fontal – GOLD in Thermaflo Champion Washed Rind Cheese Award
- Viavio Ricotta – SILVER in Green Valley Dairies Champion Fresh Unripened Cheese Award
- Viavio Biancolite – SILVER in MPI Champion Fresh Unripened Cheese Award