



Media release

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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 *Puhi 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.”

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 led 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 Cheese Association, to honour excellence in cheese making.

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

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This release was prepared on behalf of the NZ Specialist Cheesemakers Association (NZSCA) by Goode PR, Auckland. For information, images or interviews please contact Rachael Morgan at rachael@goodepr.co.nz or Olivia Deadman at olivia@goodepr.co.nz (09) 480 9948.

The NZ Champions of Cheese Awards are run by the NZSCA and are open to both members and non-members throughout the country.

Category Winners 2017

***Countdown* Champion of Champions Cheese Award (Commercial)**

Meyer Gouda Cheese
Meyer Smoked Goat Gouda

***Puhi Valley* Champion of Champions Cheese Award (Artisan)**

Mercer Cheese
Fifty Fifty

***Milk Test NZ* Champion Cheesemaker Award**

Catherine Oakley
Just Ewe – Winsam Farm

***Innovative Packaging* Champion Butter Award**

Unsalted Butter – NZMP Clandeboye

***Epic Beer* Champion Yoghurt Award**

Clevedon Valley Buffalo Vanilla Bean Yoghurt – Clevedon Valley Buffalo

***Green Valley Dairies* Champion Fresh Unripened Cheese Award**

Mozzarella Log – Massimo's Italian Cheeses

***Kiwi Labels* Champion Feta Cheese Award**

Puhi Valley Feta – Puhi Valley Cheese

***CHR Hansen* Champion Soft White Rind Cheese Award**

Grinning Gecko Brie – Grinning Gecko Cheese Co.

***180 degrees* Champion Goat Cheese Award**

Meyer Goat Milk Gouda – Meyer Gouda Cheese

***NZ Chefs Association* Champion Sheep Cheese Award**

Just Ewe Winsam Farmhouse – Winsam Farm

***Thermaflo* Champion Washed Rind Cheese Award**

Puhoi Valley Cellar Range Washed Rind – Puhoi Valley Cheese

***Ecolab* Champion Blue Cheese Award**

Kapiti Kikorangi – Fonterra Brands NZ

***Eurofins NZ* Champion European Style Cheese Award**

Barrys Bay Havarti – Barrys Bay Traditional Cheese

***AsureQuality* Champion Dutch Style Cheese Award**

Meyer Fenugreek – Meyer Gouda Cheese

***Ministry for Primary Industries* Champion New Cheese Award**

Meyer Smoked Goat Gouda – Meyer Gouda Cheese

***Mad Millie* Aspiring Cheesemaker Award**

Zev Kaka-Holtz – Grinning Gecko Cheese Co.

***Fonterra Co-operative Group* Champion Original Cheese Award**

Kapiti Kikorangi – Fonterra Brands NZ

***Brancott Estate Wines* Champion Flavoured Cheese Award**

Meyer Smoked Gouda – Meyer Gouda Cheese

***Tetra Pak* Champion Cheddar Cheese Award**

Mainland Tasty Cheddar – Fonterra Brands NZ

***Renco New Zealand* Champion Export Cheese Award**

Kapiti Kikorangi – Fonterra Brands NZ

***New World* Champion People's Choice Cheese Award**

Kapiti Kahurangi Creamy Blue – Fonterra Brands NZ

***Caspak* Champion Cheese Packaging Award**

Barrys Bay 3 Cheese Selection – Barrys Bay Traditional Cheese

***Curds & Whey* Champion Home Crafted Cheese & Cheesemaker**

Mozzarella – Sandra Crone, By The Whey