

Swiss Entry Best at World Jersey Cheese Awards

In the beautifully appointed Members Room of the Royal Jersey Agricultural & Horticultural Society on June 11, eight judges confronted 102 cheeses originating from 10 countries, each made from the milk of one breed of dairy cow—the Jersey.

Their task? Find the World's Best Jersey Cheese.

Eight hours later, there were 17, then two, and finally one—a cheese made by the hand of a Swiss artist, a cheese that was “as stunning to look at as to savor.”

In 2008 the World Jersey Cattle Bureau launched the world's first produce awards dedicated to a single breed of livestock: the World Jersey Cheese Awards.

The concept was simple: demonstrate the quality and diversity of cheeses made from 100% Jersey milk to reinforce in the mind of consumers and retailers that when it comes to quality, look for “Jersey” as a mark of the very best.

With 100 entries from 10 countries, that first judging was a spectacular success, generating global publicity for Jersey milk cheeses and being short-listed in the 2008 Chartered Institute of Marketing Awards for the “Best Marketing Achievement on a Small Budget.”

So, much was expected from the second judging, and indeed, much was delivered.

“An unforgettable four days,” said John Allison, cheese industry consultant and expert judge from Denbigh, U.K., serving as a lead judge.

“I was amazed by the variety of cheeses made from Jersey milk. When we were opening the packages of entries, it rather felt like Christmas to see all of the differing types of cheese in their varied and distinctive packaging.

“The Gold Medal winners were of an

extremely high standard,” Allison added, “and would have ranked as such anywhere in the world. The diligence and skill of the panel of judges made it an enjoyable and worthwhile competition.”



Judge supreme from among 17 cheeses tapped for Gold medals was Jersey Blue, made by Willi Schmid of Städtlichäsi Lichtensteig, located in the Toggenburg region of northeast Switzerland.

For the other lead judge of the contest, Kathy Guidi of Artisan Cheese Marketing, Toronto, Ontario, “Jersey Blue is as stun-



Jersey Blue: World's Best Jersey Cheese

ning to look at as it is to savor!

“Dome shaped with a grey-brown molded exterior, the thick veining—resembling inkspots more than the usual thin blue veins—are highlighted against a

butter yellow cheese paste. Willi Schmid said he uses a very special culture from Italy and a distinct method of piercing to achieve this.

“The extra creamy cheese paste melts on the palate with complex layers of butter, wine and blue piquant with just a hint of salt. The finish is long and balanced.

“The secret ingredient? You know it: 100% raw Jersey cow milk skillfully handcrafted in the art of cheesemaking.”

The Medal Tally

Under the watchful eyes of John Allison and Kathy Guidi, six judges worked in pairs for the first phase of the judging, evaluating and ranking the 102 entries divided into nine different classes. The panel included Michelin-starred chef Andrew Baird; David Warr, owner of Cooper & Co. Ltd. tea and coffee purveyors; members of the Slow Food Jersey Convivium; and Peter Ness, Jersey breeder and senior vice president of the World Jersey Cattle Bureau.

Scoring standards were established as a maximum of 10 points for general appearance, 15 points to the cheese's body and texture, and 25 points for its aroma, flavor and balance. Cheeses earning 46 to 50 points, practically “faultless,” were awarded Gold Medals. Scores of 41 to 45 points earned Silver Medals, signifying cheeses that are “excellent, but not quite at their peak.” Bronze Medals were presented to cheeses with scores between 36 and 40 points. Judges were instructed to award as many, or as few medals in a class as appropriate.

A total of 38 medals—17 Gold, 10 Silver, 11 Bronze—were awarded to entries from eight countries: United States of America, 20; United Kingdom, 5; Australia, and Switzerland, 3 each; Jersey, the Netherlands, and South Africa, 2 each; and Denmark, 1.

The Gold Medals were awarded as follows.

Australia: Vintage Cheddar, Alexandra Cheese Co.; *Denmark:* Thise Jersey Gouda, Thise Mejeri; *Netherlands:* Remeker and Olde Remeker, De Groote Voort; *Switzerland:* Jersey Blue and Muehlestein, Willi Schmid;

United Kingdom: Full Fat Soft Cheese, Longley Farm; Partridges Blue, Exmoor Blue Cheese Co.; Brucklay Gold, S. & R. Poortman & Sons; Kielder, Northumberland Cheese Co.;

United States of America: Carmody, Bellwether Farms, Petaluma, Calif.; Four Corners Caerphilly and Ascutney Mountain, Cobb Hill Cheese, Hartland, Vt.; Jersey Maid Neige en Été, The Farmstead at Mine Brook, a Queen of Quality® producer-distributor from Charlemont, Mass.; Taste of Athens, Gingerbread Jersey Cheese, Augusta, Wis.; Ole Hickory, Homestead Creamery, Jamesport, Mo.; and Spring Brook Farm Tarentaise, Farms for City Kids Foundation, another Queen of Quality® producer-distributor at Reading, Vt.

U.S. Entries Shine

Having served as lead judge for the first North American Jersey Cheese Awards last year in Syracuse, N.Y., Kathy Guidi provided an in-depth perspective on the U.S. entries in the 2010 world contest.

“Judges were especially amazed with cheeses like Ole Hickory made by Homestead Creamery which actually was in a tie position for World’s Best until a tiebreaker re-tasting of Ole Hickory and Jersey Blue forced out a winner.

“Cobb Hill Cheese’s entry Welsh Caerphilly style Cheddar, Four Corners, literally confounded several judges with its authentic British crumbly texture and delicate lactic tang.

Spring Brook Farm Tarentaise, one of the top three in last year’s North American Awards, was back to win a Gold to show it ranks among the best Jersey cow milk cheeses in the world while Gingerbread



Ein Käsetresor mit 1,900 Goldstücken

Born of a Swiss farming family, Willi Schmid learned his craft from the bottom up. He is a man passionate about cheese, but first of all, about milk. “Milk is more than just a commodity,” his eponymous website wilschimd.com states. “The milk is the cheese flavor. The milk quality and its freshness for cheese production are important factors: the higher the fat content and protein composition, the higher is the quality of cheese. Our milk suppliers all live in the Toggenburg. I know every farmer and almost every animal.”

“Milch ist nicht gleich Milch.” All milk is not alike. How completely Schmid appreciates the implications of that fact is clear. On his website, he describes three types of milk that he uses: “cow’s milk” from the Toggenburg Brown Swiss cattle, “goat,” and “Jersey milk.” Only certain types of cheese are made from Jersey milk, because it differs from “normal” milk in fat, protein and vitamin A content, as well as in taste.

Schmid and his wife Beatrice founded the Städtlichäsi four years ago in the tiny village of Lichtensteig. It is a micro-operation, every step done by hand 600 liters (roughly 160 gallons) at a time. His cellars have been described as “a cheese vault with 1,900 gold pieces,” aptly describing the not only the Gold medal cheeses Jersey Blue and Muehlestein but also a long list of awards Schmid’s cheeses have earned in recent years.

Jersey Blue is imported to the U.S. by Quality Cheese, Fort Myers, Fla., as part of the exclusive Caroline Hostettler Selection.

Jersey Cheese Taste of Athens proved that the marriage of high quality flavoring added to a high quality Jersey cow milk

proportion of Jersey cows in their ‘black and white’ herds to improve the overall milk quality and profitability. This is improving the quality of the products made with their milk.”

“While the spotlight was on Willi Schmid, his profile is similar to many of the Gold award winners. Jersey milk naturally lends itself to master cheese makers to craft a profusion of world-class cheeses.”

World Jersey Cheese Awards lead judge Kathy Guidi

cheese base, creates a Gold award winner.”

Other medal winners from the U.S. were Fromage Blanc con Citrone (*Silver*), Acoustic Farms, Iowa; Boeren Kaas Gourda (*Silver*) and Hill Folk Jersey

and Jersey Emmet (*both Bronze*) for Buckeye Grove Farm, Ohio; Jersey Maid Mountain Cheese (*Silver*), The Farmstead at Mine Brook; Sharp Cheddar and Mature Gouda, Gingerbread Jersey Cheese (*both Bronze*), Caraway Seed (*Silver*), Homestead Creamery; plus Floradell (*Silver*) and Opus (*Bronze*), Wake Robin Farm, N.Y.

“One of the more unique moments of this judging” Guidi added, “was the premiere tasting among the judges of American standards Monterey Jack, Co-Jack and Farmers Cheese,” earning a Silver and two Bronze medals, respectively, for Gingerbread Jersey Cheese. “While less ‘sophisticated’ than some of the more showy cheeses like brie, blue or washed rind, the high quality of these award-winning cheeses demonstrated that every cheese made well deserves an award in its class when it brings out the best in the milk.”

On to 2011 Regionals

For John Allison, the contest highlighted another key point. “Though the cheeses judged on June 11 were made from 100% Jersey milk, it is worth noting that a large number of milk producers now have a

proportion of Jersey cows in their ‘black and white’ herds to improve the overall milk quality and profitability. This is improving the quality of the products made with their milk.”

The World Jersey Cheese Awards are now established every two years in Jersey. Planning is underway for the second North American

regional at the AJCA-NAJ Annual Meetings in Wisconsin, as well as three more regional contests in 2011. For details, visit the Awards web site, www.jerseycheese.com, and facebook.com/jerseycheese.