

DAIRY INDUSTRIES

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Supplier Profiles 2019

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What makes a top cheese is sometimes open to debate, but generally it is a combination of hard work and artisanal skills that produce a splendid cheese. This year, the International Cheese & Dairy Awards at Nantwich's Supreme Champion the Wyfe of Bath, from The Bath Soft Cheese Company of the UK, was no exception.

Out of 5,087 cheeses and dairy entries from 30 countries plus a first entry from Japan, this one rose to the top for the 250 judges who spent the morning tasting, along with the 300 stewards who helped organise the cheeses, judges and implements. "This cheese is succulent, nutty and creamy and is made by placing the curd in cloth lined baskets. It retains the basket shape and has a soft light caramel colour. Wyfe of Bath takes its name from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and, like the tale, when you cut into a Wyfe of Bath you will get a taste of old England," the cheese makers say.

The weather didn't stop the judging, and despite the agricultural show being cancelled on the Wednesday, the judges persevered.

Needless to say, The Bath Soft Cheese Company managing director Hugh Padfield notes, "We are absolutely thrilled. To win Supreme Champion at the International Cheese Awards is an achievement that every cheese maker dreams of, and for a small rural business like ours, it's incredible. Nantwich is the biggest show in the world, so this is the equivalent of winning the World Cup. We have a fantastic team here at the farm

A matter of cheese

Wyfe of Bath came tops in a cheese judging day that saw 5,087 cheeses evaluated and a lunch that sat 1,390. Suzanne Christiansen reports



Ian Luxton of Belton Farm hands The Bath Soft Cheese Company managing director Hugh Padfield the Supreme Champion Trophy. Photo credits: Tim Jervis

who make all the cheese by hand, and we could not hope for better recognition for the hard work put in; from milking the cows to making the cheese."

The company was presented with a total of six awards at the show, including Best Washed Rind Cheese and Best Speciality Cheese for its Merry Wyfe and The Bath Soft Cheese was the winner of Best English Cheese and Best Soft Cheese with Rind. In 2014, its Bath Blue won the World Cheese Awards as well.

Going blue in the US

Seconded up was US-based Jasper Hill Farm, which captured the Reserve Supreme Champion award for its Bayley Hazen Blue cheese. The cheese also collected a gong for being a champion overseas cheese. It further has the honour of taking the reserve supreme champion trophy silverware overseas for the first time since the competition's inception in 1897.

During the trophy presentations on Wednesday, 31 July, Michael Landis, the ambassador for North American Cheeses, received each of the three trophies and gold medal awarded to Jasper Hill Farm for its flagship Blue. He helped co-ordinate 200 US artisan entries (twice as many as last year), which racked up 45 medals and four trophies. According to Landis, "There was a lot of excitement from the judges along with the spectators at the event. The supreme judges, clearly impressed with Bayley, noted that it was creamy and well balanced, that it was like silky cream, rich butter, and a had great balance of subtle spice and mushroom flavours."

Back in the UK

Belton Farms also saw continued achievements this year, with a whole host of awards. Having accrued the most points in show, it was awarded the National

The lunch saw 1,390 people seated for a buffet feast at ICA 2019





Michael Landis with Chris Chisnell, left and David Williams right, collected the awards for the US cheese contingent

Westminster Trophy for the ninth consecutive year for the points collected.

Belton Farm also received 13 trophies including: Champion Modern British Cheese, awarded to Red Fox, The Champion Cheese for Children, awarded to White Fox, and the Champion Farmhouse Cheshire Cheese awarded to its Coloured Cheshire. The company added to its total collection with 18 gold, 12 silver and 24 bronze awards.

Speaking after the awards, managing director Justin Beckett said, "We are absolutely delighted with our achievements. The International Cheese and Dairy Awards are a highlight in the awards season for the industry and it is a great honour to have our cheese celebrated in front of customers, both from the UK and overseas."

"For Belton, our milk suppliers and all of the people we work with, it's important to put on a great performance at the show by gaining recognition for our consistent quality, and what better than being the highest points producer in the show."

Belton supplies cheese into the UK supermarkets and independent wholesalers and also exports worldwide.

Supply side

Meanwhile, suppliers were also at the show meeting their customers. Perishable Movements Ltd (PML) for its part was on hand to discuss air freight and door-to-door solutions for the cheese industry.

Robert Haynes, PML business development manager, notes that food companies are diversifying overseas, and thus the need for its services is increasing. Nick Finbow, PML's sales director, says that the market has definitely changed over

the last few years and cheese suppliers entrust companies such as PML to deliver products overseas under temperature controlled conditions.

He notes that the company will discuss with the supplier what it wants and the shortest transit times while keeping the temperatures correct for the products. Sophisticated temperature readers are employed to ensure quality of product en route to the destinations. The reader updates the system on the product's temperature control and where it is on the journey, thus allowing close monitoring of the products and how well they are travelling.

Dairy UK honours Armstrong

With a lifetime of experience in dairy processing, Alan Armstrong was honoured for his service to the sector with the Dairy UK Cheese Industry Award at the show in Nantwich. Armstrong, who retired in March 2019, began his career with Express Dairies before moving on to various companies within the industry, and was recognised for his contribution and skill in improving outputs and efficiencies as well as being on hand to provide ideas, advice and opportunities to the sector.

Also commended were Armstrong's project management skills; having overseen the development of a state-of-the-art dairy facility, as well as his ability to build valuable links across the sector and his adaptability in an ever-changing industry.

Commenting on the award, chief executive of Dairy UK Dr Judith Bryans says, "We're thrilled to present Alan with the Dairy UK cheese Industry Award for 2019. His drive to continually

PML not only deals with temperature control and tracking, it also provides secure facilities and features such as metal detection and customs. The company is seeing more trade in the Middle East and Africa, and is looking at the west coast of the US for further export business, Haynes and Finbow note. **Dii**

The 5,087 cheeses and dairy entries from 30 countries plus a first entry from Japan needed 250 judges to assess which one came first



Next year's International Cheese and Dairy Awards in Nantwich will be held 28-29 July 2020.



Alan Armstrong collects his award from Dr Judith Bryans, chief executive of Dairy UK

improve dairy processing and to share knowledge and ideas are a testament to the strength of those we have working in the industry. Many congratulations Alan."

Chairman of the International Cheese and Dairy Awards Chris Chisnell adds, "It's fantastic that Dairy UK recognises the people who dedicate their careers to the dairy industry. On behalf of the International Cheese Awards I would like to congratulate Alan on his well-deserved award."

A working day...

Michael Landis of Food & Beverage Educational Services

Q. What in your background prepared you for your current role?

There is no straight line taking me to where I am today as a cheese educator and judge. I spent four years in the US Marine Corps in Italy, where I began understanding more about food and wines. I worked in many different industries, including recreational diving, photography and food and beverage. The structure and organisational skills I acquired as a young marine, a strong natural curiosity and a desire to have fun brought me to where I am today. Of course, the fact that I love to teach doesn't hurt either.

Q. Why did you decide to get into this area?

Getting a cheese on a menu, in stores and in the mouths of consumers is paramount when you are promoting a brand. Early on, I was involved in writing recipes, working with chefs who used my products and attending consumer shows sampling my products. I always loved learning about characteristics of the cheeses, so pairing them with beverages was a natural progression. What I couldn't have foreseen was the explosion in artisan cheeses as well as craft beers, ciders and wines. People are interested in discovering these new culinary avenues and I get excited at how instrumental my education is in expanding people's horizons.

Q. How do you think the US cheese market is evolving?

The growth of speciality cheese in the US is amazing. There are new cheeses made based on old recipes, where the local terroir takes over and a brand new cheese is born. There are several factors contributing to this growth. American consumers are now excited about the higher quality and uniqueness of cheeses.

Another factor is the growth of craft breweries in the US. Just a few years ago there were about 500 breweries and today there's over 6,000. The small, hand-crafted element and higher quality at a premium price are aspects of the craft beer world that fit with the direction that American artisan cheese makers are going.

Q. How has your job changed over the past few years and why?

Teaching cheese and pairings has become easier now than it was in the past. About 15 years ago, I was introducing an expensive Italian washed rind cheese to a class and one of the deli managers said they couldn't sell this cheese in their store. Today, that very cheese is in just about every deli around the country, and they don't have trouble selling a \$9 piece of cheese. What I hear today is: can I get that cheese in my deli? It's about customer education and a willingness to pay a premium price for a premium cheese that made the change.

Q. What has been the most interesting thing you've encountered when cheese judging?

I've been judging cheese for 10 years and the quality and diversity of cheeses have dramatically changed for the better.



This year at the International Cheese Awards in Nantwich, they created a US category. The judges were thrilled at the high quality and flavours they encountered with these cheeses, and American cheese makers took home 45 medals and four trophies for their cheeses this year.

Q. What do you consider your greatest challenge/achievement?

As much as the American artisan cheeses are gaining in popularity, there are still customers that are afraid of aromatic cheeses or cheeses with mould. I use a mild Limburger in my "Introduction to Cheese" courses so students can taste a mild washed rind cheese. I still have students that will not try it, even when people around them in the class tell them it tastes like toast with butter on it. They just can't get past the aroma. Getting people to expand their horizons is my greatest challenge.

On the other hand, helping people discover a great cheese or cheese pairing for themselves is a very rewarding achievement. I also really loved being the American Ambassador for North American Cheeses this year at the International Cheese Awards in Nantwich. Representing the brand new USA Category of Cheese at such a storied institution is an honour. Being asked on the Supreme Judging panel at International Cheese Awards was a milestone, to say the least.

Q. What does a typical day look like for you?

A typical day of teaching cheese starts with the idea that each cheese has a story. We experience a specific set of flavours and characteristics, we learn about the influences of terroir and milk, and we learn about the process of making the cheese. That's what we do all day – discover cheeses. The best part is helping people discover flavours and descriptors for each cheese and creating a vocabulary for them to use to help a customer find the best cheese for them.

Q. Outside of work, what are your hobbies/interests?

Scuba diving is one of my favourite activities. I also enjoy hiking. I also have two golden retriever rescue dogs at home that have an insatiable appetite for swimming. **Dii**