**NZ CHAMPIONS OF CHEESE 2019**

*The country’s finest cheese named*

**For Immediate Release Wednesday 22 May 2019**

Two gouda cheeses made by family-owned cheese companies have taken the top honours at the annual New Zealand Champions of Cheese Awards.

**Meyer Cheese Goats Milk Gouda** was named Countdown Champion of Champions (Commercial); and **Mahoe Farmhouse Cheese, Cumin Gouda** was awarded Puhoi Valley Champion of Champions (Boutique Cheese Award).

These trophies were among 26 announced at the **2019** **NZ Champions of Cheese Awards** on Tuesday 21 May at a gala dinner at the Distinction Hamilton Hotel and Conference Centre.

Organised by the New Zealand Specialist Cheesemakers Association (NZSCA), the NZ Champions of Cheese Awards has been run since 2003. A total of 223 gold, silver and bronze medal winners were announced in March, after judging at the AUT School of Hospitality & Tourism in February. Judging was again under the guidance of Australian Master Cheese Judge, Russell Smith.

Russell reflected on the results saying the awards for Dutch-style cheeses reflect the quality of these cheeses in New Zealand.

“Kiwis are fortunate to have a handful of brilliant cheesemakers here making these types of cheeses. I judge across the world and Dutch-style cheeses made in New Zealand are as good as anywhere in the world.”

**Meyer Cheese Goats Milk Gouda**

Russell Smith said “It doesn’t come any better than this. This is a cheese you never want to finish - it’s just stunning. It’s superbly made and offers beautiful sweet, nutty flavours.” Made with 100% goats milk at the Meyer Gouda Farm and cheese factory, just out of Hamilton, this sweet, creamy cheese was also named Champion Goat Cheese at the 2019 NZ Champions of Cheese Awards.

Meyer Cheese is a fully-fledged family affair. After being established in Waikato in 1976 by Fieke and Ben Meyer, the next generation are at the helm today. Son, Miel took over as general manager in 2007 when Ben and Fieke retired. In 2011, eldest son Geert returned from The Netherlands to take on the role of head cheesemaker for the company. Geert also collected a trophy at the Awards when he was named Milk Test NZ Champion Cheesemaker – the second year in a row he has won the title. Meyer cheeses are widely available at supermarkets and specialty retailers throughout New Zealand.

**Mahoe Farmhouse Cheese, Cumin Gouda**

Made to a traditional Dutch recipe, which adds the cumin seeds to the curd. After three to six months of ripening the refreshing lemon zing of the cumin flavours the whole wheel. According to Master Judge Russell Smith, Mahoe Farmhouse Cheese, Cumin Gouda **“**is an exceptional cheese.”

Anna and Bob Rosevear and their family have been making Mahoe cheese in the Bay of Islands since 1986. Son Tim takes care of the 60 Fresian cross-bred cows whose milk goes straight from the milking shed to the cheesery next door and is crafted into cheese by sons Jesse and Jake who work

alongside a Dutch cheesemaker. Mahoe Cumin Gouda is available from the Mahoe Cheese Farm Shop on the farm in Oromahoe Bay and also from selected retailers across the country.

NZSCA chair, Neil Willman said this year’s awards have been a great success, with the reintroduction of judging of butter and yoghurt as well as the introduction of new categories. The new Sacco Systems Champion Fresh Italian Style Cheese was hotly contested with Viavio Limited, Viavio Burrata taking the title. This year the Huntley & Palmers Favourite NZ Specialty Cheese Shopping Experience was added to recognise excellence in retailing speciality cheese, this award went to C’est Cheese in Featherston.

Neil Willman paid tribute to the panel of 21 judges who assessed more than 280 cheeses, butter and yoghurt products in February. Additionally, he made special mention of the Awards sponsors. “The NZ Champion of Cheese Awards wouldn’t be possible without the businesses that support our industry and we are grateful for their generous contributions”.

The **2019 NZ Champions of Cheese Trophies** are:

**Supreme Awards:**

* Countdown Champion of Champions (Commercial); Meyer Cheese, **Meyer Cheese Goats Milk Gouda**
* Puhoi Valley Champion of Champions (Boutique Cheese Award); **Mahoe Farmhouse Cheese, Cumin Gouda**
* Milk Test NZ Champion Cheesemaker; **Geert Meyer, Meyer Cheese**

**Category Trophies:**

* Fonterra Champion Original Cheese; **Fonterra Brands NZ,** **Kāpiti Kahurangi Creamy Blue**
* New Zealand Food Safety Champion New Cheese; **Puhoi Valley Cheese, Wainui White**
* ECOLAB Champion Blue Cheese; **Fonterra Brands NZ**, **Kāpiti Kahurangi Creamy Blue**
* CHR Hansen Champion Soft White Rind Cheese; **Puhoi Valley Cheese, Te Muri Triple Cream**
* Kiwi Labels Champion Feta Cheese; **Clevedon Buffalo Co**, **Clevedon Buffalo Feta**
* Green Valley Dairies Champion Fresh Unripened Cheese; **Zany Zeus**, **Zany Zeus Cream Cheese**
* Sheep Milk NZ Champion Sheep Cheese; **Thorvald, Thorvald Feta**
* Thermaflo Champion Washed Rind Cheese; **Over the Moon Dairy, Galactic Gold**
* Caspak Champion Packaging Award; **Puhoi Valley, Wainui Creamy White**
* Eurofins Champion European Style Cheese; **Waimata Cheese Company, Waimata Cracked Pepper Haloumi**
* Delta Wines Champion Flavoured Cheese; **Barrys Bay Cheese**, **Barrys Bay Peppered Havarti**
* Sacco Systems Champion Fresh Italian Style Cheese; **Viavio Limited**, **Viavio Burrata**
* Tetra Pak Champion Cheddar Cheese; **Fonterra NZMP,** **Fonterra Hautapu NZMP Noble Cheddar**
* Big Chill Distribution Champion Farmhouse Cheese; **Clevedon Buffalo Co**
* Good George Brewing Champion Goat Cheese; Meyer Cheese, **Meyer Cheese Goats Milk Gouda**
* Renco New Zealand Champion Export Cheese; **Fonterra NZMP**, **Fonterra Lichfield NZMP Cheddar**
* NZSCA Champion Dutch Style Cheese; **Mahoe Farmhouse Cheese, Cumin Gouda**
* Curds & Whey Champion Homecrafted Cheesemaker and Cheese; **Jennifer Rodrige, Belle Chevre Flat White**

**Special Awards:**

* New World Cheese Lovers' Choice; **Kapiti Kahurangi Blue**
* Innovative Packaging Aspiring Cheesemaker; **Daniel Bell, Barrys Bay**
* Huntley & Palmers Favourite NZ Specialty Cheese Shopping Experience; **C’est Cheese, Wairarapa**
* All Systems Go Auditing Champion Butter, Westland Milk Products, **Westgold Salted Butter**
* Huhtamaki Champion Yoghurt, **Zany Zeus, Zany Zeus Greek Yoghurt**