

## Golden Fork for Contribution to Fine Food announced

### P R E S S R E L E A S E



### **Contribution to Fine Food award presented to Andy and Kathy Swinscoe from The Courtyard Dairy**

As Great Taste, the world's most trusted food and drink awards, reached its grand finale for 2020, the Guild of Fine Food presented its annual **Contribution to Fine Food** award to **Andy and Kathy Swinscoe** from **The Courtyard Dairy** in Austwick, North Yorkshire.

Having been champions of British artisan cheese since they first opened the doors of The Courtyard Dairy in 2012, Andy and Kathy have been awarded this year's Contribution to Fine Food trophy in recognition of their outstanding work during lockdown, as they went above and beyond to support the cheesemaking community following the unprecedented challenges caused by COVID-19.

Turning their business around in days, the Swinscoes converted their café and cheese museum into extra packing space in order to fulfil the online orders that would keep cheesemakers in business, redeploying their 12 staff to accommodate the sudden shift. Innovations included a wooden vending shack in the carpark, dispensing hot coffee to those queueing and cheese to those who wanted to collect purchases with a contactless system and the installation of a van selling toasties and raclettes, which could be eaten in standalone ski gondola lifts.

Providing a vital route to market for cheesemakers and those in the food and drink world more widely, as the closure of pubs, restaurants and hotels saw many producers losing the majority of their business overnight, The Courtyard Dairy kept makers in business, animals in the fields and tons of artisan of cheese from being wasted. Even finding time to fly the flag for British cheese across social media and in the press, Andy and Kathy Swinscoe have contributed greatly to the survival of many of Britain's most celebrated artisan cheeses.

The Contribution to Fine Food award was presented to Andy and Kathy Swinscoe by Nigel Barden, on behalf of the Guild of Fine Food, during the virtual Great Taste Golden Fork award ceremony on Thursday 22 October.

Taking place across the Guild of Fine Food's social media channels and website, the online event brought together food lovers, producers, retailers, buyers and chefs to discover this year's stars of food and drink, providing a vital boost for the industry as the nation moves towards the most important Christmas period in a generation. Held later in the year than usual, after the lockdown interrupted judging just one week into the schedule, the Golden Fork trophy announcements are the final instalment in a Great Taste calendar that has been reinvented at every stage, in order to stimulate much-needed consumer support for independent retail and hospitality over the challenging months ahead.

This year's panel of judges included; cook, writer and champion of sustainable food, Melissa Hemsley, cook, writer, stylist and voice of modern vegetarian cooking, Anna Jones, celebrated Spanish chef, José Pizarro, Kavi Thakrar from Dishoom, food writer and cook, Xanthe Clay, and baker and author, Martha Collison, as well as food buyers from Selfridges, Fortnum & Mason and Waitrose. These esteemed palates tasted and re-judged the 3-star winners to finally agree on the Golden Fork trophy winners and the Great Taste 2020 Supreme Champion.

John Farrand, managing director of the Guild of Fine Food, organisers of Great Taste, is available for comment.



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### **Notes for editors:**

#### **Facts and figures about Great Taste 2020:**

- Great Taste is widely acknowledged as the most respected food accreditation scheme for artisan and speciality food producers
- A record breaking 12,777 different products were entered in 2020
- Entries were sent in from 106 different countries, including Estonia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Madagascar, the Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, the USA and Vietnam
- 144 judges took part this year. Less than usual, due to the pandemic and to ensure social distancing in both locations. However, the same number of judging layers were applied, to maintain the rigorous and robust process. Judges included the most demanding palates, belonging to food critics, chefs, restaurateurs, retail buyers, cooks, producers and a host of food writers, journalists and social media influencers
- Judging took place over a total of 14 weeks. Having begun as planned in March 2020, the process was then halted due to COVID-19. Judging resumed in early May, when remote judging was able to take place in judges' homes, before Great Taste returned to the judging rooms in both Dorset and London during July
- Judging took place at the following locations:
  - Guild HQ in Gillingham, Dorset, as well several other Dorset venues
  - The Guild of Fine Food's London home, No. 42 Southwark Street, SE1
  - The homes of regular judges, as Great Taste continued during lockdown
- **3,818 awarded 1-star**
- **1,294 awarded 2-star**
- **205 awarded 3-star**

### **What is Great Taste?**

Great Taste, founded in 1994 and organised by the Guild of Fine Food, has judged over 158,000 products in the last 27 years; each one has been blind-tasted by a team of judges who are dedicated to finding the most exquisite tasting food and drink regardless of branding or packaging.

### **Great Taste ratings**

**3-star:** Extraordinarily tasty foods – around 1.5% of products are awarded a 3-star each year – don't leave the shop without buying it!

**2-star:** Above and beyond delicious – 10% of entries will achieve this rating

**1-star:** A food that delivers fantastic flavour. Approximately 30% of entries will achieve this rating each year.

### **What are Great Taste judges looking for?**

They're looking for great texture and appearance. They judge the quality of ingredients and how well the maker has put the food or drink together. But above all, they are looking for truly great taste.

### **How did the judging work this year?**

Great Taste has grown and is trusted because of the rigour of its judging process. With the challenges of lockdown, and then social distancing, the Guild of Fine Food had to adapt the judging process to ensure that every entry went through enough judging layers to reach a fair rating and generate constructive feedback for the producers.

After a week of normal judging ahead of lockdown, the Guild of Fine Food quickly had to establish a way in which to judge the remaining 12,000 products. In early May, a remote judging system was established, with entries consolidated at the Guild of Fine Food's HQ in Dorset and then sent to smaller groups of judges, working remotely and sharing the experience over Zoom. This ensured that a similar number of experts assessed every food and drink product. This remote judging suited ambient, cheese and some cured products, but judges needed to get back into the judging room in early July to tackle products which require cooking, as well as frozen puddings and other logistically challenging entries. Great Taste had fewer experts in both the London and Gillingham judging locations, so the food was passed through more teams to, again, achieve the critical number of palates to ensure that the judging criteria was met and feedback was provided. Over the years, numerous food businesses, start-ups and well-established producers have been advised how to modify their foods and have subsequently gone on to achieve Great Taste stars.

In line with previous years, tea and coffee were judged in specialist facilities to ensure correct preparation. Following the considerable efforts of the Great Taste team, the judges and the flexibility of the food producers who entered, the results and thorough feedback on each product, whether award winner or not, were published only seven weeks after the originally planned results date – and are now available for retailers and consumers to discover for themselves.



### **What do the stars mean for producers?**

Recognised as a reliable stamp of excellence among consumers, retailers and major food buyers alike, Great Taste success can be the gateway to exciting opportunities for food and drink producers. As well as seeing an uplift in sales and revenue, award-winning producers also get to enjoy raised awareness by appearing in the Great Taste book, a unique directory used by many food retailers, supplying samples for high profile events and exhibiting as part of Great Taste Markets at events including RHS Hampton Court Flower Show, CarFest and Countryfile Live. Receiving a 3-, 2- or 1-star rating for products really puts producers on the map, while opening doors to investment and export opportunities.

### **What should consumers look for?**

The logo. The Great Taste symbol is their guarantee a product has been through a rigorous and independent judging process. It's not about smart packaging or clever marketing – it's all about taste.

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