

## **Rogue River Blue from the USA takes top prize at World Cheese Awards 2019**

An organic blue cheese produced by US cheesemaker, Rogue Creamery was named World Champion Cheese 2019 in Bergamo, Italy on Friday 18 October. Rogue River Blue now becomes the World Cheese Awards' first ever American champion, rising to the top among a record-breaking 3,804 entries from 42 different countries.

Made annually with organic cow's milk from Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley, Rogue River Blue is cave-aged for nine to 11 months and hand-wrapped in organic Syrah grape leaves that have been soaked in pear liqueur. The cheese was championed on the International Super Jury by Brazilian judge, Bruno Cabral, who described Rogue River Blue as a "taste party", applauding its "different sensations, balance, sweet and spicy notes".

At the end of the final judging stage, this unique blue cheese was level with a 24-month aged Nazionale del Parmigiano Reggiano Latteria Sociale Santo Stefano on 100 points, leaving it to the Chairman of the Judging Panel, food broadcaster Nigel Barden, to give the casting vote. In third place with 92 points was a raw ewe's milk cheese from Spain, Torta del Casar D.O.P. Virgen Del Prado made by Queseria Doña Francisca S.L..

Taking place in Italy for the first time in its 32 year history, the largest cheese-only competition on the planet was hosted by Bergamo's annual FORME cheese festival and a new dairy trade show, B2Cheese. The international cheese community gathered at Fiera di Bergamo to judge entries from every corner of the globe, culminating in a final 16 which featured cheeses from the USA, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, Switzerland, France and the UK.

John Farrand, managing director of the Guild of Fine Food, organisers of the World Cheese Awards, commented: "This year's top prize was almost too close to call and I would like to congratulate both Rogue Creamery and Nazionale del Parmigiano Reggiano Latteria Sociale Santo Stefano for going the distance and providing us with one of the most dramatic finales in World Cheese history. These two wonderfully different cheeses say so much about the quality and diversity of cheesemaking today; one bold and ground-breaking, the other steeped in tradition, but both hitting all the high notes with our judges. Rogue Creamery has been at the forefront of the US artisan cheese revolution for some years, so it seems very fitting for them to be the first American winners of our World Champion Cheese trophy. I'd like to thank our partners, FORME and the inaugural B2Cheese trade show, for helping us to stage one of the biggest cheese events the world has ever seen, as we continue our mission to shine a spotlight on artisan cheesemakers across the globe."

David Gremmels, owner of Rogue Creamery, added: "I am humbled and filled with gratitude. It has been nearly 16 years since Rogue River Blue was recognized at the World Cheese Awards in 2003. As a result, I worked with regulators, legislators and side-by-side with the USA Cheese Guild creating the first raw milk cheese health certificate and now Rogue River Blue is amongst other American cheeses like Pleasant Ridge Reserve and Harbison that can be found in fine cheese shops and restaurants in Europe, Australia, Japan and around the globe. I appreciate the sponsorship of this competition by the USA Cheese Guild. I share this honour with my dedicated team at Rogue Creamery, our organic herd of Brown

Swiss and Holstein cows and truly appreciate our customers and partnership with Savencia supporting Rogue Creamery's organic and b-corporation values.”

More nations than ever before were represented at this year's World Cheese Awards, as cheesemakers from 42 countries in six continents sent their entries by boat, truck, train and plane. Cheese from the likes of Australia, Chile, Russia, South Africa and the USA made its way via 13 consolidation points across the globe, while Japanese cheesemakers also made their debut at the competition, following Japan being added to the list of countries permitted to export dairy products to the EU earlier this year.

All entries were judged in a single day, as 260 experts from 35 different countries assessed their appearance, texture, aroma and flavour, giving Bronze, Silver, Gold and Super Gold awards to worthy winners. As 3,804 eventually became 16, the crowds then watched on as the finest palates in the global cheese community debated the best of the best. Featuring cheesemakers, cheesemongers, buyers, chefs, retailers and writers, the International Super Jury included Mexico's Carlos Yescas, France's Roland Barthélemy, Italy's Alberto Marcomini and Cathy Strange from the USA, who all put forward their chosen cheeses live on World Cheese TV, before crowning this year's World Champion Cheese.

Having discovered this year's top cheese, the judges then attended a celebratory dinner held at Castello Visconteo in Cassano D'Adda, where the winner of the Guild of Fine Food's annual Contribution to Cheese trophy was announced. This honour was presented to Carlo Fiori of Luigi Guffanti 1876, based in the town of Arona in Northern Italy, in recognition of a career in cheese that spans over half a century. Heading up one of the world's most respected affineurs, Carlo Fiori selects and ages the very best artisan cheese from across Italy and Europe, continuing a family tradition that has been upheld for five generations.

In a drive to reduce waste and reach out into the wider community, the World Cheese Awards and FORME partnered with Banco Alimentare, an Italian organisation that collected and redistributed over 90,000 tons of food to those in need during 2018 alone. Banco Alimentare was invited to collect cheese that had been suitably preserved during the competition, which will now be passed onto 125 charitable institutions within Bergamo. The proceeds from FORME's charity gala night, Buono come il formaggio (As good as cheese), held on Saturday 19 October, will also be donated to fund additional cheese purchases.

**Look out for further announcements of this year's other trophy winners later this week.**

Picture credit: Tim Johnston Photography.