

March 2008

Young 'upstart' wins top cheese award

A young three-month aged goat's cheese whose name means "upstart" was last night named New Zealand's top artisan cheese.

Crescent Dairy Goats' Parvenu won the Cuisine Champion Artisan Cheese Award at a gala dinner for the Cuisine Champions of Cheese Awards.

It's the second major success for Crescent's Jan and John Walter, who last year won the Champion of Champion's Award with another of their fine goat cheeses.

Based in Albany, just north of Auckland, Crescent's Jan Walter says Parvenu got its name because "it's a bit too young and clever for its age".

Winning a major award two years in a row is "amazing", she said, putting it down to the hands-on, personal attention given to every cheese that's made. Crescent Dairy Goats farm just 17 goats on their property in Albany and make just one cheese a day.

"We have total control of the whole process, from milking the goats, selecting even the goats that we want for milking and making sure that the milk for the cheese is as sweet as it can be," she said.

Each of their goats is lovingly named, from mother and daughter Christie and Agatha to family group Flute, Fiddle and Viola.

Crescent Dairy Goats also won the Fonterra Champion Original Cheese Award with its Flat White Cheese.

Newcomer to the competition, Clevedon Valley Buffalo Company, the first producer to enter fresh buffalo milk cheese in the awards, won two top categories for its Buffalo Ricotta – the NZ Food Safety Authority Champion New Cheese Award and SKYCITY Champion Fresh Unripened Cheese Award.

Judges said the overall quality of entries in this year's awards was outstanding, with 62% of the 406 cheeses winning a gold, silver or bronze medal. "When I looked at the championship round and saw 60 or so products that were of gold medal status, or very close to it, I was just blown away," said Master Judge Neil Willman.

"New Zealand produces a great diversity of cheeses which is not seen in other countries," he said. "And the overall standard of the industry is increasing at a rapid rate."

The fifth annual Cuisine Champions of Cheese Awards were presented at a gala dinner at Auckland's SKYCITY last night.

More than 400 entries for this year's awards were judged at Massey University's Albany campus by 26 judges on Sunday.

The other top prize, the Taylor's Port Champion of Champions Award, went to Fonterra Brands NZ's Ferndale Maestro Blue, made by Hospitality Magazine Champion Cheesemaker Keven (crct) Saywell.

Prepared on behalf of the NZ Specialist Cheesemakers Association by Goode PR, Auckland. For further information, images or to organise interviews with the Master Judge, winners or New Zealand Specialist Cheesemakers Association, please contact Petra Milhaljevich on 09 480 9948, 021 509 062 or email petra@goodepr.co.nz