



CONTEST INFORMATION

2009 United States Championship Cheese Contest

What is a Championship Cheese Contest?

Like the wine industry, the nation's cheese industry hosts friendly competitions among makers to determine the finest products by variety. The United States Championship Cheese Contest is the industry's main event – the largest, longest-running cheese competition in America. Cheesemakers often tout medals from this competition on product labels.

Where is this year's event?

The United States Championship Cheese Contest, held only in odd-numbered years, returns to Green Bay, WI, after a decade in other locations. The event host, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, has partnered with the Green Bay Packers to display the contest March 17-19 in the spacious Atrium at Lambeau Field.

What happens at the contest?

Visitors will see 24 cheese evaluation experts from around the nation working in teams of two. Each team will evaluate a class of cheeses such as blue-veined cheeses and use a detailed numeric system to select gold, silver and bronze medallists in each class. This is a 'technical' cheese judging, meaning that judges are seeking minor defects in flavor, texture, body and appearance. These defects are subtracted from a perfect score of 100 points. A gold medal cheese or butter will score in the 98 to 99 point range.

Who enters the contest?

Cheese companies large and small in 32 states have entered cheeses and butters into this year's competition. At 1,336 entries, it's the largest contest in U.S. history. Entries include everything from farmstead goat and sheep milk cheeses to mass-produced blocks of mild cheddar cheese; from two-ounce buttons of soft-ripened cheese to 200-pound blocks of Swiss.

How does one judge a cheese?

Our evaluators are cheese experts: university food scientists, government and USDA cheese graders, cheese buyers and cheese quality control experts. Each judge has built a career in learning the flavor and texture profile of a broad variety of cheeses. Each entry is visually examined and sampled with a cheese knife or "trier." Samples are mashed in the hand to determine body, sniffed for aroma, tasted to pick up dozens of potential defects and even "thumped" to listen for eye (hole) development.

What is the Championship Round?

Thursday, March 19 at 10:00 a.m., the entire group of judges will examine the gold medal cheeses a second time. The highest scoring cheese in the Championship Round is named U.S. Champion Cheese. This final round will be completed at about noon.

Are cheesemakers present at the Contest?

Some Wisconsin cheesemakers are present as contest volunteers. Cheesemakers from across the U.S. that earn medals at the contest will be honored April 23 in La Crosse, Wisconsin, at the Wisconsin Cheese Industry Conference.

Will contest results be made public?

Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association will post digital images and contest medallist results in real-time on the internet. The Championship Round will be videostreamed live on the internet. Please visit our website at www.uschampioncheese.org for contest information and results.