

NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Jane Cisler, 608-828-4550

jcisler@wischeesemakers.org

Largest Cheese Contest in the United States Sets Record for Entries

Madison, WI – The largest cheese, butter and yogurt competition in the United States will set a new record with 1,885 entries from 28 states. The 2015 United States Championship Cheese Contest, March 17-19 in Milwaukee, has been hosted by Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, for thirty-four years.

“It’s a great honor to execute the nation’s largest technical dairy competition,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA executive director. “We congratulate and thank the dairy community for supporting this exciting event and look forward to the addition of yogurt entries in the contest.”

Thirty-two experts in dairy product testing from 18 states will convene at the Wisconsin Center in downtown Milwaukee for the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest and will work two days to select medalists in a record 90 cheese, butter and yogurt classes. Two yogurt experts will taste 86 yogurts entered in six new classes including lowfat yogurt, high protein yogurt and drinkable, cultured products.

Judges will work Tuesday, March 17 and Wednesday, March 18 to sniff, taste and examine each entry, working in teams of two. The top three scoring entries in each class will earn gold, silver and bronze medals, respectively.

Judges work with iPads to score the cheeses. “Our online scoring system is quick and efficient, and allows for immediate feedback,” said Jane Cisler, Contest Manager. “Product scores and score sheets are available to the entrants minutes after a contest class is complete,” added Cisler.

Assisting and leading this judging team are Chief Judge Robert Aschebrock from Stratford, Wis., emeritus chief judge Bill Schlinsog, and assistant chief judges Stan Dietsche with Oshkosh Cheese Sales & Storage, Tim Czmowski with Agropur, Sandy Toney from Masters Gallery Foods and consultant Jim Mueller from Green Bay, Wis.

More than 150 dairy industry volunteers – the renowned B-Team led by Brian Eggebrecht with Welcome Dairy in Colby, Wis. – provide vital support as judges evaluate more than 30,000 pounds of cheese, butter and yogurt entries.

“All of these volunteers join with Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association to host a fair, objective evaluation,” said Aschebrock. “We’re pleased to put all entries and top scores online, in real time. We want to present a contest that’s honest and transparent for all the world to see,” he said.

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Strong growth in the contest is reflected in several new and returning cheese classes:

- Bandaged cheddar entries grew 32 percent;
- Flavored gouda entries doubled to 26 entries;
- Fresh Hispanic cheese entries grew 60 percent to 29 entries;
- Cheeses in the pepper classes grew over 50 percent to 106 entries;
- Total entries of goat, sheep and mixed milk cheeses rose to 215.

Fifteen dairy companies submitted the 86 yogurt entries, a strong debut for these new classes, according to Cisler.

The participating U.S. states include cheese, butter and yogurt from Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

The Contest is free and open to the public between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on March 17 and 18 in Exhibit Hall A of the Wisconsin Center in Milwaukee, Wis.

In the evening on March 19, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association together with Anchor Bank will host a gala, ticketed event to benefit Hunger Task Force in the Regency Ballroom at the downtown Milwaukee Hyatt Regency Hotel. During this charitable event, the entire panel of Contest judges will evaluate the “Sweet Sixteen” – the top 16 gold medal cheeses in the competition – while guests enjoy dozens of unique cheeses selected from Contest categories.

This event, “Champion Cheese Charity Event – A Benefit for Hunger Task Force,” begins at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 19. Judges will taste the 16 finalists and announce a best-of-show, United States Champion Cheese during the reception. Tickets are \$35 and may be purchased at www.hungertaskforce.org. All ticket proceeds from this event will benefit Hunger Task Force.

Chef Michael Feker of Il Mito in Milwaukee will prepare unique creations especially for this event using Wisconsin cheeses. Chef Feker will be on hand to discuss new ways to incorporate cheeses into everyday cooking. The guest MC is Steve Palec, a Milwaukee radio veteran.

Contest result and digital images will be posted on the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest website throughout the competition. Visit www.uschampioncheese.org for complete contest coverage.

Winners from around the nation will travel to Madison to receive their awards during the Wisconsin Cheese Industry Conference, April 22-23, 2015. During the Conference, gold medal cheeses are auctioned to support the contest, scholarships and the WCMA education initiatives. The Conference concludes April 23 with a gala awards banquet for the winning manufacturers.

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2015 United States Championship Cheese Contest

PUBLIC & MEDIA AGENDA

Date: **March 17 & 18, 2015**

Location: **Wisconsin Center, Exhibit Hall A, 400 W Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53203**

Phone: (414) 908-6001; Website: www.wisconsincenter.org

**** This portion of the event is FREE and OPEN to the public ****

Tuesday, March 17

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Contest First Round Judging – Exhibit Hall A

Judges will work in teams of two at 18 tables, each tasting one cheese, butter or yogurt at a time.

One entire cheese class will also be on public view. Samples will be available free for public tasting.

Wednesday, March 18

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Contest First Round Judging Continues Exhibit Hall A

Judges will work in teams of two at 19 tables, each tasting one cheese or butter at a time.

One entire cheese class will also be on public view. Samples of will be available free for public tasting.

****This portion of the event is by ticket only – tickets are \$35 and available at www.hungertaskforce.org ****

Thursday, March 19

5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Championship Cheese Charity Event -- A Benefit for Hunger Task Force

Regency Ballroom – Hyatt Milwaukee, 333 W Kilbourn Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53203

Judges will taste the gold medal cheeses selected in 80 classes. After a first round of tasting, 16 cheeses will advance as finalists. All 38 expert judges will taste these Sweet 16 cheeses and select one United States Champion Cheese and two runners-up.

Dozens of cheeses will be available to sample, hot appetizers and a cash bar also available.

Chef Michael Feker from Il Mito will prepare unique creations using Wisconsin Cheese and will be on hand to discuss how to use cheese in cooking.

Event Host: Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, 8030 Excelsior Drive, Suite 305, Madison, Wisconsin 53717
Office Phone: 608-828-4550; On-site Mobile Phone: 608-225-7130; Website: www.wischeesemakers.org;
EMail: jcisler@wischeesemakers.org