

Maine Cheese Guild
Maine Cheese Awards Press Release

Let's Hear it for Maine Cheese!
Inaugural Maine Cheese Awards Recognizes Outstanding Cheesemakers in the State



Judges assessing the entries at the first-ever Maine Cheese Awards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 13, 2021

MAINE - This past Sunday in Pittsfield, the Maine Cheese Guild hosted its annual Maine Cheese Festival, drawing over 1,000 cheese enthusiasts. The highlight of the event was the inaugural Maine Cheese Awards. Open to all licensed Maine cheesemakers, there were 105 cheeses from 20 different creameries. Cheeses were judged by a panel of six guest judges in the categories of fresh cheese, flavored fresh cheese, bloomy rind, washed rind cheese, aged natural rind cheese, aged flavored cheese, and blue cheese. The cheese was assessed based on appearance, texture, consistency, and taste. Speaking on the entries to Cheese Awards, judge Susan Axelrod, Editor at *Culture* magazine said, "So much delicious Maine cheese! It was

a joy and honor to judge the first-ever Maine Cheese Awards.” This year’s Best in Show award went to York Hill Creamery for their green peppercorn and nutmeg flavored fresh cheese.

“The highlight, for me, was laying out the beautiful Maine cheese and watching the judges’ eyes and expressions as they encountered each one. The judges were shocked at the sheer volume of cheeses represented from just a portion of our creameries. It truly was a showcase of talent, from Buxton to Whiting, Whitefield to Skowhegan, all fabulous Maine cheese!” says Maine Cheese Guild President, Holly Aker.



Maine Cheese Guild President Holly Aker (center) with Maine Cheese Award judges Susan Sherrill Axelrod, Editor at Culture magazine (left), and Christine Burns Rudaleviage, Managing Editor at edible Maine (right).

With 65 registered creameries across the state, Maine cheesemakers are producing some incredible artisanal products that sing the unique song of place and celebrate the beautiful bounty of our state. It helps that Maine’s Department of Agriculture encourages small cheesemakers and only requires a simple heat treatment process to pasteurize milk as opposed to the federal standards that require prohibitively expensive equipment. These state regulations help promote creativity by allowing cheesemakers the freedom to explore different products and techniques without having to make a substantial capital investment. Unfortunately, they also prevent many Maine cheesemakers from selling their cheese out-of-state or entering it in national and international cheese competitions, which has resulted in a lot of amazing cheese not getting the same amount of fanfare and attention that, say, some of our neighbors in

Vermont may receive. The Maine Cheese Guild is working to change that by finally providing an opportunity to recognize the state's amazing artisans and celebrate Maine's outstanding cheeses with its inaugural Maine Cheese Awards. The Maine Cheese Guild congratulates all the winners and entrants in the First Annual Maine Cheese Awards. A full list of winners can be found at the www.mainecheeseguild.org.

"Maine has an incredible amount of talented cheesemakers, but it really is a story of undiscovered talent," says Aker. "We want to provide the real exposure and recognition our cheesemakers deserve."



Vendor tents at the Maine Cheese Festival in Pittsfield on Sunday.

The annual Maine Cheese Festival brought together cheesemakers and cheese lovers from across the state for a day of delicious dairy, live music, and community. Eleven Maine creameries had tents set up for festival-goers to learn about and sample their cheese, along with a variety of other Maine vendors of artisanal products. Local food trucks, educational demonstrations, adorable animals, and locally made spirits were all part of the fun as well! For folks who weren't able to attend the Festival but still want to support and celebrate the winners of this year's Awards, the Maine Cheese Guild is offering a Best in Show Award box so cheese-lovers can take home a selection of the winning entries.

The Maine Cheese Guild wants you to love cheese and the Mainers and animals who produce it. Their mission is to support and encourage the Maine cheesemaking community, educate cheesemakers and consumers, and share the joy and art of regional cheeses. An incredible resource for cheese-lovers everywhere, the Guild offers classes and product information, and organizes community events such as the Maine Cheese Festival and the Maine Open Creamery Day. For there is much joy to be had, and much cheese to enjoy!

www.mainecheeseguild.org

www.visitmaine.com