



## Which Kent food & drink businesses have the 'X' factor?

With the nation in the grip of X Factor fever, consumers across Kent are being invited to vote for a different type of talent altogether. For the rest of December, the people of Kent have the chance to vote for their favourite food and drink products, producers, retailers and restaurants in the prestigious Taste of Kent Awards. Everyone who takes the time to vote before the closing date on 3 January on [www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk](http://www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk) will be entered into a fabulous prize draw to win a night for two with breakfast at the elegant ABode Hotel. Whether you place your votes in one category or all twelve – everyone will be entered into the draw.

The top three nominations in each category will be either judged or visited by an expert panel of judges and the 12 winners will be announced at a stunning awards ceremony in February 2010 at Leeds Castle. So who will you nominate on [www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk?](http://www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk?)

**Kent Butcher/Meat Producer of the Year**  
**Best Kentish Beer**  
**Best Kentish Wine**  
**Best Kentish Cider or Perry**  
**Kent Juice Producer of the Year**  
**Kent Local Food Retailer of the Year**  
**Kent Seafood Retailer of the Year**  
**Kent Food Product of the Year**  
**Kent Food Producer of the Year**  
**Kent Restaurant of the Year**  
**Kent Pub of the Year**  
**Kent Farmers' Market of the Year**

Taste of Kent overall sponsor is **Whitehead Monckton**

Category sponsors include **SEEDA, Kent Life, WK Finn-Kelcey, Kent County Council, Biddenden Vineyards, Bennett Opie, Barclays, Visit Kent, kff** (kent frozen foods) and **Hadlow College**.

## ...And the winner is?

Few of us could say we haven't dreamed of those four little words being spoken to us at some time in our life. Whether it's the lottery, a business award or competition, we know those four words can be the start of a new chapter.

For the past five years, a dozen or so companies each year have enjoyed the life changing experience of winning a Taste of Kent Award. Launched by local food and drink champions Produced in Kent ([www.producedinkent.co.uk](http://www.producedinkent.co.uk)), every year the general public has the exciting opportunity to nominate their favourite food and drink products, producers, retailers and restaurants.

Winning a Taste of Kent Award has proved a life changing experience for many of the winners over the past five years, as Butterfly Meadow discovered when it picked up the 'Innovative Product of the Year' last year – for its unusual 'fruit leather' - a natural dried fruit snack.

Owner Steve Dansey says the award has helped transform the company and 'fruit leather' now makes up 80 per cent of his business compared with just 25 per cent last year, whilst the company has gone from selling solely at farmers' markets to a business that now generates 70 per cent of its turnover from wholesale trading.

As Steve said, "These awards really do make a difference and help to transform companies. Winning a Taste of Kent Award was the ultimate catalyst to make 'fruit leather' our core product. We gained a huge amount of publicity and enjoyed a very successful exhibition in London thanks to our award and the prize money enabled us to put together a professional business plan with outside experts and to achieve our vision for the product. I am so grateful

to Produced in Kent for the awards and to the general public I'd say 'keep voting'. A Taste of Kent Award really is a life changer!"

The Plough, at Stalisfield Green, also underwent a similar metamorphosis when the business won 'Kent Pub of the Year' and The Plough found it such a positive experience they hope to win a second Taste of Kent Award in the future.

Landlord Robert Lloyd said the award was a real turning point for the business and the media flurry that followed the win helped a very rurally placed pub significantly increase its presence, whilst The Plough promoted the win on its menus and website.

Robert said: "Winning the award was a fantastic morale boost to the business and really cemented our belief that we were taking the pub in the right direction. It is important that the general public have a chance to vote as it allows small businesses like our own to go up against businesses with much more financial clout. A public vote followed by the Taste of Kent Awards' judging panel is a very fair system allowing the best businesses to shine through."

The Plough certainly epitomises a 'Taste of Kent' with its local Kentish ales, beers, cider and wines served alongside its fantastic local menu, as Robert explains: "Our efforts to produce traditional food using the best local ingredients seem to be welcomed by customers. People visit The Plough for our simple, unpretentious, but well cooked food using the best of local ingredients and served in a beautiful pub building and location."

A regular supplier to The Plough is Ramsgate Brewery, another Taste of Kent Award winner with the brewery reaping the benefit of the public's vote of confidence last year when it won 'Best Kentish Beer' with its GADDS' Number 3.

Brewed entirely with local hops, Lois Gadd describes the beer as the modern, true taste of East Kent. "It's testament to the quality of these hops that the beer was judged 'Best Kentish Beer' and confirmation that buying local means buying tasty!"

Lois described the win as a "real morale booster", whilst both staff and local customers were boosted by the regional recognition. As well as raising the brewery's profile in the media,

Ramsgate Brewery has been able to incorporate the win into their signage and on their bottles, adding further kudos to the award-winning product.

“Taste of Kent Awards raises the awareness amongst the general public as to the fabulous products we have here on our doorstep in Kent. For too many years we’ve all been conditioned to think that far flung sourced food is somehow superior to local produce, when the opposite is the reality.”

[www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk](http://www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk)

**Issued:** 3 December 2009

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