



NEWS RELEASE

## Top three finalists count down to nail biting final in Taste of Kent Awards 2010

The finalists in the prestigious Taste of Kent Awards 2010 have just over six nail biting weeks left to hear which food and drink producers, retailers, restaurants, dining pubs and farmers' market in Kent will lift the 12 category titles in the county's awards to recognise Kent's food and drink heroes.

The competition is the brainchild of Produced in Kent, which champions Kent's food and drink producers and retailers. Last year's awards attracted an incredible 89 per cent leap in votes, and the competition continues to reach the taste buds of Kent consumers with overall voting sustained at just over 10,000 votes for the second consecutive year. Indeed, 542 businesses and products were nominated by the general public as being worthy for an award in one of the twelve 'Oscars' of Kent's food and drink businesses. Now the three finalists in each of the categories will be subjected to an expert judging panel, mystery shoppers or mystery diners and the twelve winners will be revealed at a glittering awards ceremony on **25 February 2011** at Leeds Castle.

Notable highlights of the 2010 competition include the 'Kent Seafood Retailer of the Year' (sponsored by South East Seafood) which has seen a 50% rise in votes. Independent fishmongers have faced some of the biggest challenges in retailing and South East Seafood said it was "delighted that voters are supporting local fishmongers" by voting for the dozens of seafood

retailers that continue to be supplied by Kent's vibrant fishing community, working along the rich coastline of Kent.

'Best Kentish Brewery of the Year' (sponsored by Cask Marque) proved another hotly contested category, with a 28 per cent increase in votes reflecting the growing interest in brewing following the resurgence of micro breweries in the county. Previous winner, Ramsgate Brewery, joins the largest brewery in the county, Shepherd Neame, in the final three, together with Whitstable Brewery.

The newly re-named 'Kent Dining Pub of the Year' category puts the spotlight on the plethora of gastronomic pubs serving excellent and hearty, Kentish food. This blossoming category saw votes rise by 39% and a closely fought top ten battle to get into the final three. New finalists in this category are The George and Dragon in Chipstead, which takes on previous winners The Haywain (in 2009) and The Plough at Stalisfield Green (in 2008).

The county has shown itself to have a 'sweet tooth' and battling it out in the sweet stakes for 'Kent Food Product of The Year' (sponsored by Opies), are three expert producers of sweet treats including Madame Oiseau Fine Chocolates being nominated for its Kent Honey Caramel; Blue Bell Hill Apiaries nominated for its Kent Honey; and Kent Fine Foods voted by the general public for its Lavender Jelly.

### **Rise of the East!**

The East of Kent continues to be a centre of excellence in food and drink retailing, production and brewing. Thanet's dominance in the top three nominees is particularly impressive with Eddie Gilberts (nominated in two categories - Seafood Retailer and Restaurant of the Year), J C Rooks of Ramsgate (is back into the final three of the Meat Retailer category), Ramsgate Brewery (is in the final three for Best Brewery), Quex Barn (for Best Local Food Retailer), Ems Cupcakes of Ramsgate (for Artisan Food Producer) and former winner The Chai Stop (for Artisan Food Producer). Perhaps most impressive of all is Cliftonville Farmers' Market which has made it to top three in the Farmers' Market category for the past five years.

The West of Kent is delighted to see a flurry of companies being nominated for the very first time and newcomers include The George & Dragon at Chipstead, Hildenborough Farmers' Market, Meopham Valley Vineyard and Owlets Fruit Juice.

In mid-Kent Biddenden Vineyards, a previous multiple winner over the years, appears in the top three for three categories including the Best Vineyard, Cider Maker and Juice Producer.

The Taste of Kent Awards have become a much sought after hallmark of quality, with many of the county's leading companies keen to support and sponsor the 12 categories that make up the awards. In addition to the overall main sponsor, Whitehead Monckton Solicitors, this year Produced in Kent is delighted to welcome sponsorship support from Barclays Bank Plc, Cask Marque, Hadlow College, Kent County Council, Kent Life, kff (Kent Frozen Foods), NFU Mutual, Opies, sff (Stephens Fresh Foods), South East Seafood, Visit Kent and Wilkins Kennedy FKC. The Taste of Kent Awards is also delighted to have the media support of Kent Life, BBC Radio Kent and KOS Media.

Julie Monkman, manager at Produced in Kent said: "The Taste of Kent Awards continues to go from strength to strength as consumers vote in their thousands to acknowledge some of the best producers and retailers of food and drink. All three finalists in each of the 12 categories have already done incredibly well to get this far and they all help to maintain and raise the bar for Kent as a county of excellence for innovative and outstanding food and drink production."

To view the winners of a Taste of Kent Awards go to [www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk](http://www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk) on 1<sup>st</sup> **March 2011.**