

# Blas na hÉireann National Irish Food Awards 2012

## Showcase of food, glorious Irish food

By Dave Boland

**B**enner's Hotel in Dingle became the centre of the Irish culinary world earlier this month, with the announcement of the winners of the fifth Annual Blas na hÉireann Irish Food Awards on Saturday, October 6.

The celebrations, which this year formed part of the world-famous Dingle Peninsula Food Festival, were led by Supreme Champion Una Martin, owner

of Una's Pies, who built on a strong showing in her initial entry last year to take home the top prize in 2012.

Other top prize winners included Big Red Kitchen (Best Artisan Producer); Ballymooney Foods Rack of Wild Venison (Best New Product); Hannan's Meats (Best Export Achievement); Sasta Sausages (Best Emerging Kerry Producer); Carrygerry House (AIB Business Diversification Award); Gallagher's Bakery Plain Soda Bread (Most Innovative Product); Breizon Teo (Rogha na Gaeltachta); Atlantis Seafood - Surf N' Turf Smoked Scallops and Black

pudding (Seafood Innovation); and The Different Dairy Company - Rumlbers Range (The UCC Best Packaging Award Sponsored).

But the main winner on the evening was Irish food, which got a chance to showcase its best and most creative on a sun-drenched evening in the Southwest of Ireland.

The Blas na hÉireann Irish Food Awards are now the biggest awards of their type in the country, with more than 2,000 entrants putting themselves forward this year. Participants range from the large to the small, and from the longest established to the newest entrants

to the Irish food market but what they have in common is a commitment to excellence, and a willingness to be judged against their peers by an independent panel whose only considerations are taste and quality.

To ensure fairness, the awards are split into different categories (so there can be no "apples and oranges" comparisons) - and this year there were more than 50 categories, indicating not only the record number of entrants, but also the diversity of Irish cuisine. Of the new categories which were introduced in 2012, perhaps the most overdue is

"beers and ciders", whose inclusion reflected the growth in the number of quality micro-breweries cropping up all over the country. To find the winners out of so many entrants, the organisers utilised more than 60 judges, drawn from across the food spectrum and including chefs, critics, academics and members of the public. These judges blind tested the entries in a "restaurant" setting, and as an extra measure to ensure that no "senior" taster could influence the table, none of the judges were served the same dish at the same time.

In addition to the prestige of

the Awards themselves, some of the winners will also benefit from bursaries supplied by sponsors including Bord Bia, Taste Council, Love Irish Food, Shelf Life and Easy Food. These are awarded to help producers with the costs of such issues as mentoring, association membership, training, advertising and PR.

Winners and medalists will also benefit from the addition of the Blas na hÉireann seal of approval on their packaging - and research carried out by the organisers has shown that this is a mark which is becoming increasingly recognised by discerning Irish consumers.

## Blas winners for 2012

**Grand Champion - sponsored by Bord Bia**  
Una's Pies - Chicken Leek and Cheese

**Best Artisan Producer**  
Sponsored by Taste Council  
Big Red Kitchen

**Best New Product - sponsored by Invest NI**  
Ballymooney Foods Rack of Wild Venison

**Best Export Achievement - sponsored by Enterprise Ireland**  
Hannans Meats

**Best Emerging Kerry Producer - sponsored by Kerry County Enterprise Board**  
Sasta Sausages

**AIB Business Diversification Award - sponsored by AIB**  
Carrygerry House

**Most Innovative Product - sponsored by Love Irish Food**  
Gallaghers Bakery - Plain Soda Bread

**Rogha na Gaeltachta - sponsored by Udarás na Gaeltachta**  
Breizon Teo

**Seafood Innovation - sponsored by BIM**  
Atlantis Seafood - Surf N Turf Smoked Scallops and Black Pudding

**The UCC Best Packaging Award - sponsored by UCC**  
The Different Dairy Company for its Rumlbers range

**The Best in Farmer's Markets 2012**  
Una's Pies; Skellig Pantry; The Green Apron; Butlers Ice Cream; Sasta Sausages

**Category 1: Chocolates Individual**  
Gold The Chocolate garden of Ireland - Dark Chocolate Salted Caramel Trufflé

**Category 2: Chocolate Bars**  
Gold Gallaghers Chocolates - Cacao dark 70%

**Category 2: Chocolate Bars**  
Gold The Cake Stand - Chocolate Macaron

**Category 4: Puddings & Desserts**  
Gold Couverture Desserts - Supreme Desserts Selection for SuperValu

**Category 5: Sauces & Dips**  
Gold Big Red Kitchen - Raspberry Dessert Sauce

**Category 6: Yoghurt**  
Irish Premium Yoghurt - Canadian Blueberry for Lidl

**Category 7: Dairy**  
Gold Irish Yogurts - Irish Yogurts Creime Fraite 250g

**Category 8: Cheese Soft**  
Gold Butlers Ice Cream - Cookie Ice cream (Supercookies)

**Category 9: Cheese Soft**  
Gold Ardahan Cheese - Simply Better Ardahan

**Category 10: Cheese Hard**  
Gold Tullyboy Farmhouse - Cheese Goat's Cheese

**Category 11: Cheese Cheddar**  
Gold Cahill's Farm Cheese Limited - Ballintubber Cheddar with Garlic and Herbs

**Category 12: Cheese Blue**  
Gold Wicklow Farmhouse - Wicklow - Blue Cheese Tesco Cheeses of Ireland

**Category 13: Sausages**  
AIBP - Irish Jumbo Pork Sausages for Superquinn

**Category 14: Black Pudding**  
Gold Caherberg - Free Range Pork Black Pudding

**Category 15: White Pudding**  
Gold O'Brien Fine Foods - Simply Better White Pudding for Dunnes Stores

**Category 16: Cured Meats, Charcuterie & Bacon**  
Gold Oakpark Foods - Dry Cure Bacon Loin-Smoked for Aldi

**Category 17: Bacon**  
Gold Callan Bacon - Smoked Back Bacon Joint for Lidl

**Category 18: Pork**  
Gold Kepak - Pork Rack with Sage & Bramley Apple butter for SuperValu

**Category 19: Beef**  
Gold APB - Superior Quality Irish Hereford Fillet Steak for Superquinn

**Category 20: Poultry**  
Gold Silver Hill - Fresh Irish Crispy Roast Half Duck with 10 Pancakes and Hoi Sin Sauce for Lidl

**Category 21: Lamb**  
Gold Kepak - Stuffed Lamb Rack with Redcurrant & Rosemary Stuffing for SuperValu

**Category 22: Seafood Products**  
Gold Breizon - Window to the sea Cooked and Peeled Prawn Tails

**Category 23: Terrines / Pates**  
Gold The Smugglers Inn - Chicken Liver Pate/

**Category 24: Savoury Pies/Quiche**  
Gold Una's - Pies Chicken Leek and Cheese

**Category 25: Soup/Chowders**  
Gold Carrygerry House - Creamy Seafood Chowder

**Category 26: Sourdough Bread**  
Gold Cloughjordan Woodfired Bakery - White Sourdough Boule

**Category 27: Soda Bread**  
Gold Larkins Bakery - Cranberry and Orange Zest Soda Bread

**Category 28: Yeast Bread**  
Gold M&D Bakery - The Bloop

**Category 29: Barmbrack**  
Gold Sean Stafford Bakery - Halloween Barm Brack with ring for Aldi

**Category 30: Other Breads & rolls**  
Gold Panelto - Tuscan bread

**Category 31: Ready Meals & Prepared Foods (Hot)**  
Gold Donnybrook - Fair Fish Pie

**Category 32: Ready Meals & Prepared Foods (Cold)**  
Gold Glorious Sushi - Large Mixed platter

**Category 33: Dietary Specific**  
Gold The Foods of Atheny - Gluten Free Flapjack 'The Works' Gluten Free Coffee & Walnut cake

**Category 34: Breakfast Cereals**  
Gold The Different Dairy Company - Rumlbers Oat clusters with Raspberry & probiotic yogurt

**Category 35: Spirits & Liqueurs**  
Gold Castlebrand Ltd - Clontarf Classic Blend Whiskey - Irish Whiskey Triple Distilled for Aldi

**Category 36: Non Alcoholic Drinks**  
Gold Organic for us - Wholemilk

**Category 37: Beers**  
Gold Franciscan Well Brewery - Rebel Red Ale

**Category 38: Ciders**  
Gold DJ's Juice & Cider - Tempted Strawberry

**Category 39: Teas & Coffees**  
Gold Bewleys - Bewley's Original Blend Tea

**Category 40: Oils, Seasonings & Dressings**  
Gold David Llewellyn - Llewellyn's Irish Balsamic Cider Vinegar

**Category 41: Pickles & Chutneys/relishes**  
Gold Follain Teo - Folla/in's No Added Sugar or Salt, Fire Roasted Pepper Relish

**Category 42: Preserves, Conserves, Marmalade**  
Gold The Green Apron - Apricot, Orange and Almond conserve

**Category 43: Honey & Other spreads**  
Gold Big Red Kitchen - Lemon Curd

**Category 44: Cakes**  
Gold Fusco Foods - Belgian Chocolate Cake

**Category 45: Christmas Cakes & Puddings**  
Gold Seery's - Supreme Pudding for SuperValu

**Category 46: Biscuits**  
Gold Cloudberry Bakery - Luxury Guinness brownie

**Category 47: Savoury Snacks**  
Gold Christie's Celtic Kitchen - Black Pepper and Salt Oat Cakes

**Category 48: Crisps**  
Gold Keogh's - Shamrock & Sour cream

**Category 49: Ready Mix Cakes & Breads**  
Gold Angel Foods - Chocolate brownie

**Category 50: New Products**  
Gold Ballymooney Foods - Rack of Wild Venison

## Getting some northern exposure

By Dave Boland

**T**hough it was held in the Southwest corner of Ireland, the Blas na hÉireann Irish Food Awards are a genuinely all-island affair, and this was underpinned by the advent of Invest NI as one of the headline sponsors of the event.

Invest NI is Northern Ireland's industrial development agency, and a significant part of its remit is the promotion of indigenous products and producers from the six counties. What a lot of people don't realise is that the Republic of Ireland represents Northern Ireland's largest exporting partner, which is why an event like Blas na hÉireann is an ideal fit for Invest NI.

Of course, some companies from north of the border have participated in Blas over the



Richard O'Gorman, an Angus Beef farmer from Piltown, Co Kilkenny, is one of the many Irish suppliers starring in the 'Love Ireland, Like Aldi' campaign. Richard has supplied Aldi with Irish Angus beef for the past six years through ABP Ireland

Northern Ireland, and the Republic is a key market for us."

This year, Invest NI played an active role in promoting the competition to its constituents, and more than 60 participated, with 18 shortlisted for the final. But this was 60 out of 2,000 entrants, which is why the agency will play a more active role in promoting the competition next year.

"We came late on board this time," said McArdle. "Next year we'll be tied in at an earlier stage, so we expect to get more companies involved in the competition."

"Some of our companies did pretty well for their first time entering," he continued. "We got a number of silvers and bronzes, and one of our companies - DJ's Juice and Cider in Lisburn, won in the Cider category. That's not a bad showing for our first time. We expect to build on that performance next year."

years, but 2012 marked the first occasion when Invest NI played a formal role not only in providing sponsorship (sponsoring the award for Best New Product, won not by a Northern Ireland-based company but by Kildare-based Ballymooney Foods for its Rack of Wild Venison), but also in encouraging producers

in Northern Ireland to take part in the event.

"Promoting quality Irish food and promoting artisan companies is a major part of our remit," said Shane McArdle, Invest NI's business development director in the Republic.

"We are trying to get smaller companies to sell outside of



Richard O'Gorman, an Angus Beef farmer from Piltown, Co Kilkenny, is one of the many Irish suppliers starring in the 'Love Ireland, Like Aldi' campaign. Richard has supplied Aldi with Irish Angus beef for the past six years through ABP Ireland

## Aldi's loyalty to local produce pays off

By Dave Boland

**A**ldi was a major winner at the fifth annual Blas na hÉireann awards, scooping three gold, five silver and four bronze medals. A significant reason for Aldi's outstanding success is its commitment to sourcing the very best of homegrown Irish products, a fact which is reflected in its current advertising campaign, "Love Ireland, Like Aldi".

This campaign not only draws attention to the fact that Aldi has been a longstanding and vocal supporter of Irish food producers, but that it also encourages Irish consumers to support indigenous producers and farmers by buying Irish.

While highlighting the spectrum of Irish-sourced products now available, the campaign also emphasises the fact that these quality Irish groceries are available at an affordable price at Aldi.

Still, it is the local producers which are central to the message, and a number of Aldi's long-term Irish suppliers feature prominently across the campaign, which has involved TV ads, print ads and in-store point-of-sale branding. They also feature in an information brochure which details Aldi's relationship with its Irish sup-

pliers and producers.

As part of the campaign, a number of ads were filmed on location at farms and facilities, allowing the farmers and producers to provide a genuine account of the satisfaction that they get from knowing that their products are on Aldi shelves. There is also the satisfaction of knowing that their products are enjoyed by consumers throughout the country.

"Given the choice, our customers tell us they prefer to buy Irish as they like the guaranteed quality that comes with buying Irish and want to support the local economy," said Niall O'Connor, group buying director of Aldi.

"We want to give our customers the reassurance that many of Aldi's own-brands are made by the same factories and come from the same farms that produce many of the well-known and much-loved Irish brands. The only difference is that Aldi's own-brands are significantly better value."

"Over the past 13 years, we have adopted a localised approach to sourcing our product range, building many long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with numerous Irish suppliers, some of whom we have traded with for more than ten years."

"We have recruited more than 60 new suppliers in the last five years, effectively doubling our Irish supply base."

## Commercial profile: Aldi

### Aldi's Irish suppliers have picked up more Blas na hÉireann awards than any other retailer over the last three years



Aldi's Nature's Isle Dry Cured Smoked Bacon Loin



Aldi's Ballymore Crust Halloween Barm Brack with Ring

**A**ldi tasted further success with its Irish own-brand products, as its Irish suppliers scooped 12 titles at the 2012 Blas na hÉireann National Irish Food Awards. Aldi's Irish suppliers have now won 45 Blas na hÉireann Awards since 2009, picking up more awards than the suppliers of any other retailer over the last three years.

Aldi's Irish products won three gold medal, five silver medal and four bronze medal awards, topping the cured meats, charcuterie & bacon,

### Full list of winning Aldi products at Blas na hÉireann National Irish Food Awards:

#### Gold Medal

Aldi's Nature's Isle Dry Cured Smoked Bacon Loin  
Aldi's Clontarf Irish Blended Whiskey  
Aldi's Ballymore Crust Halloween Barm Brack with Ring

#### Silver Medal

Aldi's Killeigh Farm Luxury Caramel Fudge Dairy Ice-cream  
Aldi's Nature's Isle Select Cut Fillet Steaks  
Aldi's Specially Selected Wicklow Lamb Rump Steaks  
Aldi's O'Shea's Traditional Irish Stout  
Aldi's Taurus Irish Cider

#### Bronze Medal

Aldi's O'Shea's Traditional Irish Ale  
Aldi's Specially Selected West Cork Indulgence Toffee Yogurt  
Aldi's Walshe's Traditional Lemonade  
Aldi's Helen's Linseed Crunch with Cranberries and Almonds



Aldi's Clontarf Irish Blended Whiskey

spirits & liqueurs and barm brack categories.

Gold medal winning products included Aldi's Dry Cured Smoked Bacon Loin supplied by Oakpark Foods, Aldi's Clontarf Irish Blended Whiskey supplied by Castlebrands and Aldi's Ballymore Crust Halloween Barm Brack with Ring supplied by Sean Stafford Bakery.

Continuing on last year's success, Aldi's O'Shea's Traditional Irish Stout, Aldi's O'Shea's Traditional Irish Ale and Aldi's Specially Selected West Cork Indulgence Toffee Yogurt won medals for the second year in a row.

"We are delighted that our Irish suppliers have once

again tasted national success," said Niall O'Connor, group buying director of Aldi Ireland. "Our own-brand products are sourced from



Aldi's Killeigh Farm Luxury Caramel Fudge Dairy Ice-cream

some of the best food producers in the country and it's this commitment to providing quality Irish products at unbeatable prices that is attracting new shoppers to Aldi and growing our loyal customer base in Ireland. Our buying team works hard to offer own-brand Irish products that consumers can trust and it is great to see these products recognised for their high quality and taste by our peers."

A proud supporter of Irish producers, Aldi has tripled its annual spend on Irish products over the past five years, helping maintain over 20,000 jobs across the Irish food industry. Since 2008 Aldi has recruited over 60 new Irish suppliers, doubling its Irish supply base. Aldi now partners with over 125 Irish suppliers, producers and manufacturers, whose products are responsible for generating over 50 per cent of the grocery sales at Aldi.

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Rack of wild venison 2012 awards

● Gold blas na hÉireann ● Gold great taste award

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+353 45 892 000