

National Trust Press Release

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Outstanding products win prestigious National Trust 'Fine Farm Produce Award'

Twenty-four food producers from across England and Wales are celebrating this week having picked up a prestigious Fine Farm Produce Award from the National Trust, including **Westerham Brewery, in Kent.**

The awards, now in their fourth year, celebrate the breadth and quality of produce farmed, grown or processed on land owned or managed by the National Trust, including tenant farms, orchards and gardens.

A total of 37 products – including mushrooms, cheese, lamb, beef and onions – have received the award and will now be able to use the coveted Fine Farm Produce Award logo on their products. The winning products were chosen from a very high standard of 46 separate entries.

To qualify for judging, products must meet strict criteria of provenance and environmental and animal welfare standards. Then, in order to win a coveted award, each product is subjected to a rigorous taste test by a panel of judges. Westerham Brewery, based on the National Trust's Grange Farm in Crockham Hill, near Edenbridge in Kent, was set up in 2004 by Robert Wicks.

He worked with the Trust and farmer Ian Strang to use hops from nearby Scotney Castle, and Little Scotney Pale Ale and Best Bitter were launched in July 2005.

The Best Bitter won last year, so this year it was the turn of the pale ale to impress judges. They described it as smooth on the palate and praised its 'warm amber colour and good hoppy scent.'

The brewery is also committed to high environmental standards. "Whilst we use traditional brewing methods, we have modern equipment which allows us to be very water-efficient and use minimal amounts of chemicals," said Robert.

"We use whole hops at the start of the brewing process for bitterness, at the end for flavour and aroma. Then, during maturation, it is dry hopped – a traditional technique where hops are suspended in the beer for seven days," he explained.

A proportion of the profits from the Pale Ale and Best Bitter are reinvested back into the hop gardens at Scotney Castle, where a new organic hop area is being developed.

Around 16,000 bottles of the ale are sold every year through Trust properties, Waitrose in the South East, independent retailers and mail order.

Winning the award has huge benefits to the business, according to Robert: “From launch, the Pale Ale and Best Bitter sold one for one in the shops. But since winning an award for the bitter last year its sales have gone up 75 per cent.”

Rob Macklin, the National Trust’s head of agriculture, said: “The awards are given to only the very best produce from the places looked after by the National Trust.

“More than 80 per cent of the land we care for in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is farmed, and we work closely with many of our tenants in helping them develop high quality products.

“Winning an award means that products have had to pass rigorous tests to ensure they are produced to the highest possible standards.

“Since 2006, over 80 products have received a Fine Farm Produce Award and this year’s winners will join a group of some of the very best producers that the country has to offer.”

This year the panel included Henrietta Green, a food writer, broadcaster and founder of FoodLoversBritain.com, who set the standards for the original Fine Farm Produce Awards, Richard McGeown, a restaurant owner who trained under Marco Pierre White, Gordon Ramsey and Raymond Blanc, and Rob Macklin, the National Trust’s head of agriculture.

Henrietta Green added: “The standards set by the National Trust for these awards are extremely high.

“As someone who has pioneered the cause of the small British producer, it is so encouraging to see such fantastic regional British food delivering on quality, distinctiveness, provenance and taste.

“This year we tasted rare-breed pork, hill lamb, grass-fed beef, dried-cured bacon, daisy-fresh crabmeat, single-variety apple juices and blossom honey – to mention a few.”

The National Trust is passionate about using local and seasonal food in its 150 tearooms and cafes. Many of this year’s Fine Farm Produce Award winners sell their produce either through their own farm shop or direct to customers.

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