

It was such an honour to be included in the judging panel at the 2019 Blas na hEireann - Irish Food Awards which are held every year in October in Dingle.

This is an utterly unique experience, and it is an extremely well regarded, and prestigious accolade for the winners.

Blas na hEireann “celebrating and rewarding the absolute best tasting Irish food and drink products and the passionate, driven producers who make it” was founded in Dingle in 2008, and was the brainchild of Artie Clifford, Chairman. Before this there was no indigenous Irish accreditation for Irish Food. The Awards run alongside the Dingle Food Festival every year and have grown over the years to now having over 2,500 entries in 2019.

For food producers who are lucky enough to win at ‘Blas’ the accreditation they receive is universally recognised, and the Blas logo on a product ensures consumers a top-quality Irish product.

The Judging panel on the day was comprised of chefs, restaurateurs, food journalists, authors, academics, and food influencers. People who share a passion for quality Irish food and want to shout about it. The judging process was developed by University College Cork (UCC) and the University of Copenhagen and is now recognised as a gold standard worldwide.

The process begins with a producer entering the event and sending their product for judging. This initial phase is undertaken in UCC, and only five products in each category make it to final judging day in Dingle. Products are categorised and judged on their own merit, with all packaging removed to make a level playing field for all sizes of producers.



On the day, the judges arrive to the event and are

allocated a table and a colour - I was the green judge - then each green judge at each table (10 tables in total) get the same product at the same time - the blue judges get a different product, red another different and so on.

There are a huge variety of products to judge, and lots of categories. On the day, our table had cheese, milk, pate, beef, bacon, vinegar, shellfish, cakes, crackers, and much more. Each round brought another little gem to the table much to our delight. The judges then allocate their marks based on different scientific criteria, and the scores are collated. The winners are informed the following day.

There are bronze, silver and gold awarded in each category, and there are also key award winners, including Supreme Champion, which this year was Green Pastures Donegal for their amazing soft cheese.

I had such a great day catching up with everyone and enjoyed chatting with friends Karen Coakley - the Kenmare Foodie, Russell and Patrick - The Gastro Gays, Kate Ryan - Flavour.ie, Chef Jess Murphy and John and Sally McKenna - who were awarded Producers Champions for their service to the Irish Food industry.