

— FINALISTS — RAS President's Medal

SIX OF AUSTRALIA'S CULINARY CHAMPIONS ARE VYING FOR THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY'S PREMIER TITLE, THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NSW'S PRESIDENT'S MEDAL. WE PRESENT THE FIRST THREE NOMINEES.



Left to right: the Poachers Pantry team; some of the faces behind Brasserie Bread; Iris, Oliver and James Crooke of Gundowring Fine Foods.

The Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) is instrumental in turning Australia's premier produce into dinner party must-haves and restaurant menu highlights – with the iconic Sydney Royal medals adorning the finest produce. However, through a unique judging process, it's the President's Medal that truly tests those champion medal-winners.

As well as culinary distinction, entrants must impress the judges with their commercial success, environmental integrity and their social involvement. Six businesses are chosen to represent the very best of Australia with only one awarded the medal. Over three special features we'll introduce six nominees and celebrate the winner. Here are the first three.

CATEGORY: DELI MEAT POACHERS PANTRY – SMOKED DUCK BREAST

One of the finest Australian smokehouses, Poachers Pantry, is situated in the beautiful NSW countryside, just near the ACT border. Veritable slow food champions,

they use traditional hand-crafted techniques, premium quality ingredients and natural wood smoke to get award-winning results.

Since 1973, the Bruce family and their dedicated team have been refining their approach, smoking and curing different meats to turn a business originally established as a small artisan supplier for hotels and restaurants, into one with a growing retail range, the Smokehouse Restaurant, Wily Trout Vineyard and Cellar Door. Their ever-expanding business has become central to the economy and community of Springrange.

Founded with a background in grazing and livestock management, Poachers Pantry know that meat of impeccable quality is the essential starting point when producing award-winning deli products – and this stems from nurturing and respecting the land. This is why they are dedicated to using only the best classic and contemporary meat products in their 20+ range, including bresaola, kangaroo, prosciutto, smoked lamb rack and smoked chicken breast. Of course, then the wood

selection, herbs, spices and premium fruit and vegetables are expertly balanced to respect and enhance the meat at the heart of the product.

It's Poachers Pantry's delicate and silky Smoked Duck Breast that is causing a wave of excitement at RAS HQ, which has previously taken out a swag of gold medals, trophies and champion titles, with the President's Medal in reach.

CATEGORY: PROFESSIONAL BAKERY BRASSERIE BREAD – FLINDERS RANGES SPROUTED WHEAT (LOAF)

Passionate pioneers of single origin bread, Brasserie Bread is dedicated to the integrity of the entire bread-making process, starting right at the source with the wheat growers themselves. Co-founder and Director, Michael Klausen, is passionate about creating artisan bread that speaks of the sun, the weather and the soil from where the wheat was grown.

Working closely with Flinders Ranges' Premium Grain wheat farmer Andrew Byerlee, Brasserie Bread produces the unique Flinders Ranges Sprouted Wheat



Clockwise from below: slashing the dough at Brasserie Bread; Gundowring Fine Foods' Licorice Ice Cream; Poachers Pantry restaurant; freshly served at Poachers Pantry; Brasserie Bread's Sprouted Wheat Loaf.

(loaf), a robust sourdough crafted from Katana wheat and Murray River salt. The finished loaf has a wonderful crunchy crust, a rich, waxy texture, and an appealing nuttiness and earthy character.

Brasserie Bread's passions go beyond baking to also include sustainability. As active advocates of sustainable farming practices and embracers of sustainably grown produce, Brasserie Bread have hosted panels with a focus on soil replenishment through organic matter and the use of natural farming techniques. Their aim is to ensure nutrient-rich soil continues to deliver premium wheat, such as the Flinders Ranges' Katana as featured in their Champion-winning loaf. Brasserie Bread is also a proud supporter of OzHarvest's initiatives and donates overbaked bread to events held along the East Coast of Australia.

Brasserie Bread provide Australians with quality sourdough, are active participants in supporting farmers and their precious soils, and give back to the wider community – making them strong contenders for this year's medal.

CATEGORY: CHEESE & DAIRY PRODUCE GUNDOWRING FINE FOODS – LICORICE ICE CREAM

The Crooke family are fourth generation dairy farmers who have been working their Gundowring property since 1945. But it wasn't until 2003 that they ventured into the rich and creamy world of award-winning ice cream – and Gundowring Fine Foods was born. Through training initiatives and employment, as well as being a market for local produce, such as the fruit, nuts and honey that all feature in their decadent selection of ice creams, today the business is an integral part of the local community and economy.

The organic licorice featured in the Champion Gundowring Licorice Ice Cream was sourced from the certified organic Junee Licorice and Chocolate Factory in NSW, and is unashamedly intense, smooth and brimming with aniseed flavour. Gundowring's beloved herd of Holstein cows provide the other

key ingredient – fresh, rich, creamy milk, fed on the lush Kiewa Valley pastures. The property is operated using careful and clever farm management techniques, such as ensuring any pasture surplus is collected for use in the difficult summer heat and winter frosts, selective use of irrigation and water conservation, and solar power.

The dedication to the property even extends beyond their enviably green pastures to the broader ecosystem and regional biodiversity. In fact, 20% of the farm has been fenced off as part of a re-vegetation program that also acts as wildlife and riparian reserve, and an essential nature corridor.

An exquisite product, an emphasis on minimising their environmental footprint, and 'giving back' makes Gundowring Fine Foods worthy of RAS's top prize.

2018 AWARDS NIGHT

The winner will be announced at the President's Medal Award Night held on the 28th March during the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Guest chef Colin Fassnidge is set to get creative with the finalists' incredible produce. For more information and tickets visit rasnsw.com.au/presmedal. Meanwhile, look out for three more nominees featured in the next issue.