

# Organic milk turns to gold

Farmer Jess Vaughan knows the organic milk she makes on the family farm in Hardwicke tastes great, but she's not the only one as it's impressed the judges at this year's Great Taste Awards, she tells **LUCY PARFORD**

**O**RGANIC farmer Jess Vaughan and her four-legged 'ladies' are celebrating after winning two prestigious gold medals in the Great Taste Awards – their eighth in three years.

Jess lives at Hardwicke Farm which has been farmed by her family for three generations. She created The Ladies Organic Milk brand and built the dairy on site at Hardwicke with the help of her dad, Mike, in 2006.

The first bottles hit the shelves in November of that year and the company has grown ever since.

The milk, which comes from a herd of 80 cows, was the first ever pasteurised milk to win a Great Taste Award in 2008, and its further wins this year for its semi-skimmed and whole milk proves it really is the cream of the crop.

As well as the Great Taste Awards, which are organised by The Guild of Fine Food, Jess' products have also fared well in this year's Taste of the West awards, winning a gold for the cream and a silver for both the semi-skimmed and special breakfast milks.

Jess' Ladies Organic Milk is not homogenised and because the cows graze on organic pasture, it typically contains higher levels of natural omega 3.

As well as scooping a haul of medals, The Ladies Organic Milk is now used by the Michelin-starred Casamia restaurant in Westbury on Trym, in Bristol, and the company has just started supplying the experimental kitchens of one of the world's top restaurants – Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck in Bray.

Jess says: "It's a real privilege to work with acclaimed chefs.

"They seem to all agree it's amazing the difference our products make – so it's not just us that think the ladies are pretty amazing."

Last year Jess and her ladies starred in the Hairy Bikers' Christmas TV special and



Jess Vaughan with some of her delicious organic milk

she has just signed a deal with Selfridges to stock her milk in its food hall.

"It's hard work farming and marketing but it's easy with such a great product as a base," she says. "Attention to detail at every level really does pay off."

Jess's Ladies Organic Milk is available in 80 shops throughout the south west including the Natural Grocery Store and Tivoli Butchers in Cheltenham and every Saturday at Stroud Farmers' Market.

■ For more details, see [www.theladiesorganicmilk.co.uk](http://www.theladiesorganicmilk.co.uk)

## And the other winners are . . .

Three stars

**Five Valleys apricot and ginger cordial**, Stroud

Two stars

**Fig and plum relish**, Kitchen Garden Foods Ltd, Stroud

**Five Valleys lemon and mint cordial**, Stroud

**Gloucestershire apple and ginger juice**, RH & JC Elgie, Hilter Fruit Farm, Newent

One star

**Citrus spiced whisky liqueur**, Cotswold Country Liqueurs, Arlingham



rapeseed oil, Stanton, Broadway

Luxury coconut

**meringues**, Cotswold Handmade Meringues, Nailsworth

**Sparkenhoe Red Leicester, lovage and mustard cheese bites**, Paxton & Whitfield, Bourton-on-the-Water

**Cropwell Bishop Stilton, thyme and cracked black pepper cheese bites**, Paxton & Whitfield, Bourton-on-the-Water

**Belly pork**, Todenham Manor Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh

**Cotswold Gold**

## Local food



Victoria plums

**STEPHEN WHEELER**, commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the country

FRESH English plums are just coming into season, and who can resist a bowlful of the traditional Victorias, Marjories, Greengages or Pershore yellow egg? Neighbouring county Worcestershire used to produce thousands of tonnes each year before cheaper imports had their effect, but you can still see the remaining plum orchards around Evesham in full springtime bloom. Mise en Place will be taking delivery of local fruit from Hayles Fruit Farm, in Winchcombe, where plums have been cultivated for generations. I asked some local chefs for a quick and easy plum recipe:

**Plum Sauce by The Cotswold Chef Rob Rees**

*Ingredients*

500g dark fresh plums  
 ½ chopped red onion, 3 slices chopped fresh ginger  
 1 garlic clove, 1 tbsp olive oil  
 1 dried red chilli, 75ml red wine vinegar  
 150ml water, 60g dark brown sugar  
 1 tsp ground cinnamon  
 1 tsp five spice, 2 star anise  
 50ml dark soya, 1 tsp finely chopped lemon grass  
 2 cardamom pods

*Method*

Place stoned plums into a saucepan and cover with water and white wine vinegar. Bring to simmer until soft. Strain through a sieve.

Sweat onions in saucepan, add all other ingredients plus the plums and simmer for 45 minutes until reduced. Allow to chill and serve with crispy duck.

**Vanilla Plum Muffins by Rachel Bray of Muffin Marvellous in Churchdown**

*Ingredients*

315g self raising flour  
 125g granulated sugar  
 2 eggs  
 250ml milk  
 60g melted butter  
 150g homemade victoria plum jam  
 2 tsp vanilla extract

*Method*

Mix dry ingredients. In a bowl combine the milk, eggs, butter and vanilla, add to the dry ingredients, mix to batter consistency. Half fill 12 paper muffin cases. Add a spoonful of jam to each case, cover with the remaining batter. Bake in a preheated oven for 20 minutes or until light brown.