

Farmgate gastronomy

Galway has been designated as the European Region of Gastronomy 2018 and food producers directly linked to farms have played a big part in this achievement

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Galway and the west of Ireland is the first region in the country to attain the prestigious European Region of Gastronomy designation. It holds the title for 2018; as does the Noord Brabant area of the Netherlands. Gaining the title took an enormous amount of effort by a wide variety of stakeholders led by Galway County Council, Galway City Council, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and Teagasc. The overall theme is: "From the Ground Up, Feeding our Future". We visited three local food producers in the region but there are dozens more contributing to the growing food culture.

Food Works – creating food entrepreneurs

Food is an important part of the Irish economy, representing 12.3% of total export revenue. The industry is projected to be worth €19bn by 2025. Food Works supports the people and businesses creating our food future.

Food Works is a Government-supported accelerator programme, run by Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc, who have worked together since 2012 to support innovative food businesses in Ireland. Each of the three agencies involved with Food Works plays a specific role in taking Irish food to global markets. Food Works helps to develop the next generation of scaleable and export-driven Irish food businesses, so far helping more than 70 Irish food entrepreneurs. See: <http://foodworksireland.ie/>

Key messages

Galway and the west produces enough food to feed over 1.5m people. It boasts over 12,000 farms, 689km of coastline, 52 islands and over 350 restaurants.

The European Region of Gastronomy 2018 designation aims to bridge the gap between food producers and consumers by creating a greater awareness of foods produced in the west of Ireland and making good

food more accessible to all.

Food and associated culture will be explored across five key focus areas:

- Education and health.
- Linking urban with rural.
- Cultural diversity.
- Sustainability.
- Supporting SMEs.
- Working to enhance the region and to work collaboratively to provide a better future for the next generation is a key goal.



Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese

The Roche family has farmed in the historic and rich landscape of Abbey, southeast Galway, for almost 200 years, converting the Kylemore House farm into a dairy enterprise in the 1960s. Bertie and Julie Roche, along with their son Brian, run a herd of 97 Holstein-Friesian crosses supplying Arrabawn Co-op.

Daughter Teresa Roche (pictured left) is behind the creation of Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese. Although a relative new comer to cheese-making, she is already causing a stir with her unique offerings of Swiss-inspired cheese, which is the only Irish-made Swiss cheese available in Ireland. Teresa won a National Enterprise Award 2018, Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Galway Best New Business.

"I have worked as a nurse in Australia, New Zealand and the United States," says Teresa. "But I always had the notion of returning to develop a business on the home farm. While in New Zealand, I spent some time working with the Maori farming community in the Waikato region. While there I got a great insight into how to develop a business in food production on a farm."

A two-week holiday home in 2015 turned into two years of preparation, studying cheese production in Switzerland and completing various mentoring and business courses run by Galway Local Enterprise Office and Musgrave's Food Academy Programme.

"Once I decided to develop a cheese I got great help and support from our neighbour, and cheesemaker, Marion Roeleveld." Marion has won awards for her Killeen cheese brand. Indeed, over the past 12 years, the Roche farm has been supplying Marion with milk for her cheese production.

Low-carbon

"I think the low-carbon footprint of our production is a great selling point," says Teresa. "We produce the cheese in a dedicated building located just beside the milking parlour. And we only make cheese with milk from grazed grass."

Over 50 litres of milk are required to produce each 5kg wheel of Teresa's Swiss-type cheese. Appenzeller cheese is the main product but Teresa also produces a Gruyère Beaufort style of cheese. Both are long maturing, from a minimum of three months up to 18 months.

"My current stock is maturing now at six months, producing a nutty, creamy, buttery flavour cheese. We are producing a high-quality milk product which is fully traceable and Bord Bia Origin Green-approved.

"Developing a new product, and new skills, requires an awful lot of training and research into production and marketing," says Teresa. "Getting hold of funding for a new initiative can be difficult and time-consuming too."

Marketers always say you should find your market niches before producing and Teresa has done just that: "We've had excellent interest from people at home and abroad who have tasted the cheese," concludes Teresa. "You'll meet with some scepticism when you start something from scratch, but if you keep at it and produce a quality product you'll get there. Tenacity is probably what you need more than anything else."



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