

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

Hugh Weathers, Commissioner



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CERTIFIED SC GROWN MAKES ITS MARK AT 2009 CHARLESTON FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL

Local and Celebrity Top Chefs Create Winning Dishes with Certified SC Grown Secret Ingredients

COLUMBIA, S.C. (March 9, 2009) – Hugh Weathers, South Carolina’s Agriculture of Commissioner, challenged 16 local and celebrity chefs to create delicious dishes incorporating Certified SC Grown produce and products as “secret ingredients” during the Certified SC Grown Cooking Competition last Saturday, March 7, at the 2009 Charleston Food and Wine Festival.

On Saturday afternoon, Certified SC Grown hosted four, one-hour long “Iron Chef” style cooking competitions in the main tent of the Festival’s Culinary Village on Marion Square in downtown Charleston. Local and celebrity chefs faced off as teams of two using Certified SC Grown “secret ingredients” to create culinary masterpieces. These “secret ingredients” included SC grown and raised quail, goat cheese, clams and peanuts. At the end of each hour-long competition, each team’s dish was tasted and judged by a panel of distinguished judges, including local restaurateurs, authors, musicians and entertainers.

Celebrity chef and former contestant of Bravo’s hit television show, *Top Chef*, Richard Blais, emceed each competition and invited the audience to participate by judging how well the chefs worked together, interacted with the crowd and completed their dishes in the allotted time.

Winning teams of the cooking competition included, John Ondo of *Lana* in Charleston, S.C., and John Currence of *City Grocery* in Oxford, Miss.; Chad Classcock of *The Fat Hen*, in Charleston, S.C., and Jason Ulak of *Caviar & Bananas* in Charleston, S.C.; Kevin Johnson of *Anson Restaurant* in Charleston, S.C., and Alexandra Guarnaschelli of *Butter* in New York City, N.Y. ;and finally Linton Hopkins of *Restaurant Eugene* in Atlanta, Ga., and Hugh Acheson of *Five and Ten* in Athens, Ga.

Many of the competing chefs represented local restaurants participating in the South Carolina Department of Agriculture’s *Fresh on the Menu* program, the restaurant phase of Certified SC Grown, of which participating chefs pledge that at least 25 percent of their menus will be dedicated to local products and /or produce when in season. *Fresh on the Menu* was launched in Charleston last year, and there are now more than 150 participating restaurants across the state. For a complete list please visit: www.FreshontheMenu.com.

After winning his competition, John Ondo, Executive Chef at *Lana* in Charleston, SC, a *Fresh on the Menu* participant commented with the following, “As a South Carolinian, I am so proud to use local ingredients in the foods I prepare.”

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During his remarks to the crowd, Commissioner Weathers discussed the importance of purchasing and eating locally grown foods. "When the link between farmer and consumer is the shortest we can make it, everybody wins."

Weathers also introduced a new term he's hoping will sweep the state- Palmettovore- for those who make the conscious decision to eat SC grown foods. "Eating the Palmettovore diet such as the dishes created here today helps support our farmers, producers and our number one state industry, agribusiness."

For a complete list of chefs competing in today's event, see the enclosed list and for more information about Certified SC Grown, Fresh on the Menu and Palmettovores, please visit www.certifiedscgrown.com.

About Certified SC Grown

The Certified SC Grown initiative was developed and created three years ago by the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to brand and promote South Carolina grown produce and products through cooperation among producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and restaurants.

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