

PRODUCED IN KENT

We're just nuts about local food

Launch of awards for 2012

The Taste of Kent Awards for 2012 are being launched this month.

The public will be urged to vote for their favourite local food and drink products.

In a change to the awards, Produced in Kent will also be inviting local businesses to nominate their own products in two new food product categories for the retail and food service sectors.

Organisers say this change will allow lesser-known products to receive recognition for their excellence by a panel of expert judges, rather than rely on a public vote for nomination as a finalist.

by David Jones

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COBNUTS form the basis for a fascinating tale of co-operation between four of the county's niche food producers.

The "Cobnut Four" are members of Produced in Kent, the champions of the county's food and drink producers. A fifth member of Produced in Kent is also supplying fruit to one of the four.

The "Cobnut Four" is headed by farmer Alexander Hunt at Potash Farm in St Mary's Platt.

Once the nuts have left his farm, they are transformed into a range of culinary treats.

■ Simon Knott, a fudge maker in Colliers Green, Cranbrook, is now making cobnut fudge and cobnut brittle using Alexander's cobnuts.

■ Matthew Kearsley Lawson, who runs Kent Fine Foods in Hempstead, Gillingham, is making handmade chutneys, jams, jellies and sauces. He is producing rhubarb and ginger chutney with cobnuts, orange marmalade with whisky and cobnuts and blackberry and apple conserve with brandy and cobnuts.

■ Tricia McTaggart runs a business called Bonnie Shortie in Great Chart. It makes cakes and biscuits and is making cobnut shortbread and cheese biscuits



Cobnut farmer Alexander Hunt displays some of his products at the Cruise Show, Olympia

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for Alexander which are being launched in late August or early September. Alexander said: "In my 25 years of cobnut growing, the business has transformed itself from supplying the wholesale markets in the mid-80s to selling all 45 nut related products to Potash farm's customers direct this year.

"The confectionery products, biscuits and jars are all made by

Produced in Kent members with whom I work very closely.

"They are all extremely talented in their different ways and their products are highly regarded by Potash Farm's customers.

"Potash farm attends 10 farmers' markets and two to three specialist events per month and supplies 80 to 90 shops in the South East and has a large web-based business.

"The initial launch of the handmade Kentish cobnut shortbread and the Kentish cobnut and Canterbury cheese biscuits have been exceedingly well received. The Ashmore Ancient cheese is the perfect partner to the Potash Farm cobnuts."

Matthew Kearsley Lawson's business has gone from strength to strength since he won the Taste of Kent award for best Kent food product in the 2010 Taste of Kent Awards with his lavender jelly.

He has really embraced the benefits of collaborating with other Produced in Kent members and now buys all his local fruit ingredients from a fellow Produced in Kent member, the Payne family at Pine Trees farm in Doddington, who themselves were a Taste of Kent award winner for their apple juice in 2008.

Produced in Kent manager Julie Monkman said: "We actively encourage members to work closely together and these recent collaborations are a wonderful example.

"The cobnut story is a great illustration of different culinary skills and expertise being brought together to create a unique and popular range of products.

"We applaud this group and particularly Alexander for his proactive and innovative approach to transforming the simple Kentish cobnut."