

# EXPERT JUDGES



# WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

CHEESE



CONTEST



MARCH 3-5

2026

# 2026 EXPERT JUDGES



**VALERIE ARECHIGA**  
Glanbia Dairy Nutrition  
Twin Falls, Idaho

Valerie has over a decade of expertise in dairy innovation, specializing in cheese technology and product scale-up. She leverages this expertise to scale novel natural cheese technologies to the mainstream market.



**GABRIELE ARLOTTI**  
Cheeseltaly  
Emilia-Romagna, Italy

Gabriele is a journalist with a degree in Animal Production Sciences and the founder of Cheeseltaly, the Italian National Cheese Team. A certified taster, he has judged at the WCCC in the US, the World Cheese Awards, and currently serves on the ICDA judging panel in the UK.



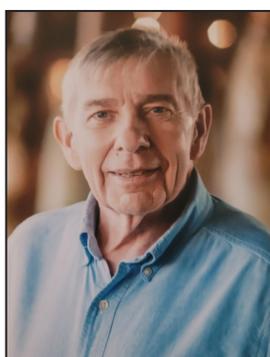
**MAARTEN BAKKER**  
Royal FrieslandCampina  
Wageningen, Netherlands

Maarten has over 25 years of experience in Dutch type cheese as technologist, troubleshooter, and product developer for FrieslandCampina. He is the two-time winner of the National Dutch Cheese tasting contest, a yearly competition of over 600 judges.



**MARC BATES**  
Bates Consulting  
Cannon Beach, Oregon

Marc Bates of Bates Consulting LLC retired after a 59-year career in the cheese, dairy, and food industries. He has taught cheesemaking, pasteurization, and food safety short courses in partnership with major universities.



**LARRY BELL**  
Lbell Consulting  
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Larry is retired and continues to do consulting work in the dairy industry. He spent 35 years at Schreiber Foods working in production, research and development, purchasing, and as a supplier food safety auditor.



**TED BROWN**  
Cabot Creamery  
West Glover, Vermont

Ted has been grading a variety of cheese on a regular basis for 30 years, allowing him to continually expand his knowledge of what makes the best cheese, ensuring consistent quality and customer satisfaction.

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## **KJ BURRINGTON**

**ADPI**

**Madison, Wisconsin**

KJ has over 30 years of experience in the dairy and food industry as a food scientist. Most of her career has been spent doing product development and training people about the use of dairy ingredients.



## **OKSANA CHERNOVA**

**Ardis Group, ProCheese Academy  
Kyiv, Ukraine**

Oksana is a Ukrainian cheese expert with over a decade of experience in cheese selection, training, and education. As a member of the International Guild of Fromagers, she works to promote and develop modern Ukrainian cheese culture.



## **BÉNÉDICTE COUDÉ**

**Ingredion Incorporated  
Bridgewater, New Jersey**

Bénédicte Coudé is a senior scientist with Ingredion Incorporated working on the development of innovative dairy and dairy alternative applications. Prior to joining Ingredion, Bénédicte worked for 10 years in the cheese industry.



## **DOMINIQUE DELUGEAU**

**Saputo Cheese USA  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Dominique has 40 years' experience in the specialty cheese industry. They have served as Chair of the ACS, CIAA, and IDDBA and have over 25 years of experience judging cheese globally.



## **MIKE DUDAS**

**Schuman Cheese  
Fairfield, New Jersey**

Mike Dudas is the Senior Director of Procurement for Schuman Cheese. Since 2002, Mike has been responsible for all aspects of domestic sourcing, including grading and evaluation, risk management, and government compliance.



## **DR. MÚCIO FURTADO**

**IFF**

**São Paulo, Brazil**

Mucio travels all over Latin America providing tech assistance on cheese technology to cheese plants. He has published several books dealing with cheese making. He earned a Ph.D. degree on Food Science from Michigan State University.

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## **CHAD GALER**

Dairy Management, Inc.  
Glenview, Illinois

Chad leads research programs at universities to drive dairy innovation for dairy products and ingredients on behalf of U.S. dairy farmers and coordinates the Collegiate Dairy Product Evaluation Contest to train future dairy leaders.



## **MARK GARDNER**

Fonterra  
Melbourne, Australia

Mark is a seasoned professional in dairy food manufacturing, including cheese, UHT Milk, and Infant Formula. He has extensive experience with cheese grading and maturation. Mark has also been a judge multiple times for the Dairy Industry Association of Australia.



## **CRAIG GILE**

Tree of Life  
Vancouver, Washington

Craig spent 22 years at Cabot Creamery in roles spanning production, quality, R&D, and sales. He now serves as National Cheese Sales Director for Tree of Life and brings extensive domestic and international technical judging experience.



## **ENDA HOWLEY**

Ornua  
Cashel, Ireland

Enda manages Ornua's cheese grading team in Dublin and brings over 26 years of experience in the industry. He specializes in grading Irish and international cheeses, including cheddar, Dubliner, Gouda, and reduced-fat varieties.



## **CHRIS HUISMAN**

Velder/FrieslandCampina  
Bodegraven, Netherlands

Chris has been working with Dutch cheeses for more than 30 years and is currently an S&OP planner at Velder, where he is responsible for stock management and teaching young staff. He is the 2025 winner of the National Dutch Cheese Tasting Contest, an annual competition with 750 contestants.



## **KORY HYVONEN**

Kory's Cheese Sales  
Omro, Wisconsin

Kory Hyvonen is a Licensed Wisconsin Cheese Maker and certified grader with 20+ years of experience, delivering quality dairy products with unmatched expertise and passion.

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**LUIS JIMÉNEZ-MAROTO**  
Center for Dairy Research  
Madison, Wisconsin

Luis works in the Cheese Applications group at the Center for Dairy Research. With 15+ years of experience, he specializes in cheese functionality and sensory science, and is a seasoned judge in national and global cheese competitions.



**AILEEN KACVINSKY**  
Schuman Cheese  
Madison, Wisconsin

Aileen has built her career in Production and Quality Control roles across several cheese organizations and now works in a technical position with Schuman Cheese. She holds a BS in Food Science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.



**SAMIR KALIT, PHD**  
University of Zagreb  
Zagreb, Croatia

Samir Kalit is a full professor at the University of Zagreb. He cooperates with the dairy industry, helping with troubleshooting. He has judged dairy products in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Germany, the USA.



**DIETER KOCH-HARTKE**  
DMK Dairies  
Herford, Germany

As a milk technologist, Dieter has over 30 years of experience in the production, quality, and quality management of cheese and dairy products. He also regularly leads evaluating contests in other continental competitions.



**KYLE KOLL**  
Sargento Foods  
Plymouth, Wisconsin

Kyle is a Senior Supplier Quality Manager - Corporate Cheese Grader. He holds Wisconsin Grading Licenses in American and Swiss cheese and has been part of the Sargento Family grading cheese for over 15 years.



**DREW KORDUS**  
Great Lakes Cheese  
Kiel, Wisconsin

Drew is an experienced Food Safety and Quality Assurance Manager with a demonstrated history of working in the food production industry. He is skilled in sensory evaluation, quality assurance, microbiology, and continuous improvement.

# 2026 EXPERT JUDGES



**DR. ARNOLDO LOPEZ-HERNANDEZ**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Madison, Wisconsin/Mexico

Teaching Faculty in the Department of Food Science at the University of Wisconsin, Arnaldo has 18 years of experience judging dairy products. He has evaluated entries for both the Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest and the WCCC



**THIERRY MARTIN**  
Agropur Canada  
Winchester, Ontario, Canada

With over 40 years of experience in cheesemaking, Thierry has held various roles across the industry and served as a judge in multiple international competitions.



**CHRISTOPHE MEGEVAND**  
Consultant  
Thones, France

Graduate of the French National School of Dairy Sciences, Christophe is an expert cheese maker in hard and Alpine cheese specialties, with over 50 years of successful experience leading award-winning international and US-based teams.



**ERIC MEREDITH**  
Jimbo's  
San Diego, California

Eric's career in cheese started at Murray's in New York. That path led to France to work with renowned affineur Hervé Mons, followed by leadership roles designing award-winning affinage facilities for Wegmans and Neal's Yard Dairy.



**DR. LLOYD METZGER**  
Valley Queen  
Bruce, South Dakota

Lloyd is the VP of Quality and Technical Services at Valley Queen and leads the QA, product development, and process technology teams. He also has 20 years of experience in academia and was a Professor at SDSU and U of MN.



**PETER MITCHELL**  
Coombe Castle  
Sturminster Newton, UK

Peter has 40 years of working experience in dairy products manufacturing, the majority of which has been with both large and small cheesemakers. His work is predominantly in the UK but also in the Middle East, Italy, and Romania.

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**TAKAYUKI MIURA, PHD**  
Nippon Vet. & Life Science Univ.  
Tokyo, Japan

Takayuki has served as a judge for all Japan Natural Cheese Contests in 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023, and 2025, and was a final judge in 2021. He has also judged at the World Cheese Awards in 2021, 2023, and 2025, as well as in Norway in 2018 and at the World Championship Cheese Contest in 2024.



**GINA MODE**  
Center for Dairy Research  
Madison, Wisconsin

Gina joined the Center for Dairy Research in 2005 and is involved with everything from cheese and butter pilot plant trials and troubleshooting to short course instruction and outreach efforts.



**LARS JOHANNES NIELSEN**  
Danish Dairy Board  
Odense, Denmark

Lars is passionate about dairy products. His experience includes being the Head of the International Food Contest, Judge of Danish PGI cheeses, and the Chief Judge at Lurpak butter assessments.



**PER OLESEN**  
St Clemens Bornholms Dairy  
Klemensker, Denmark

Per has lived and breathed cheese throughout his life as the director and cheese producer of St. Clemens Food Products, located on the small island Bornholm in the Baltic Sea. He was named World Champion of 1998 World Championship Cheese Contest



**MICHAEL PEDERSON**  
Wisconsin Master  
Cheesemaker Program  
Argyle, Wisconsin

Michael worked for WDATCP as a cheese grader for 32 years before retiring. He has judged several United States and World Cheese Contests. He is currently the Chief Grader for the Master Cheesemaker Program



**DR. LEYDA PONCE DE LEÓN**  
Univ. of Puerto Rico - Mayagüez  
Mayagüez, Puerto Rico

Leyda Ponce de Leon, PhD, earned her Ph.D from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1999. For the last 24 years, she has been teaching the courses Milk and Dairy Products and Dairy Products in the Animal Science Department at UPR-RUM.

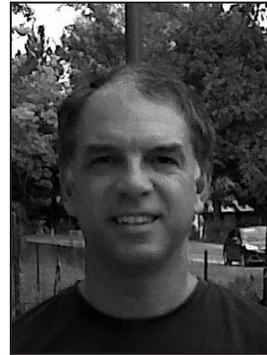
# 2026 EXPERT JUDGES



## **PABLO RIVERO**

Grupo Entrepinares  
Valladolid, Spain

Pablo has 12 years of experience in the cheese sector, leading new development projects, start-up of new factories, and optimization of cheese processes. He also has experience as an International Cheese Judge (ICA, Cincho, WCA).



## **MIGUEL ROLO**

Etapa Improvável  
Lisbon, Portugal

Miguel began 27 years ago with the production of sheep's milk for producing traditional raw milk cheeses. He is involved in the regulation of European PDO cheeses, and has had the opportunity to work with organizations on several different kinds of European cheese.



## **DR. FRANCISCO DE ASÍS RUIZ MORALES**

IFAPA  
Granada, Spain

Francisco serves as a judge in national and international cheese competitions. He combines his research work with his role as Regional Director of the International Goat Association in Western Europe.



## **ROLAND SAHLI**

Gourmino  
Langnau, Switzerland

Roland trained as a master cheesemaker and food engineer. He also has over 30 years of professional experience in the Swiss cheese industry.



## **STELIOS SARANTIS**

Hellenic Dairies  
Trikala, Greece

Stelios belongs to the 3rd generation of owners of Hellenic Dairies, a leading dairy industry in SE Europe and the largest Feta cheese producer. He is a chemical engineer with his Master's in Food Technology from the Ohio State University.



## **CHRISTIAN SCHMUTZ FROMARTE**

Duedingen, Switzerland

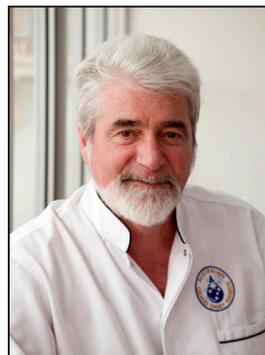
Christian has completed his apprenticeship as a cheese maker and completed studies in food engineering. He has three years of experience as a cheesemaker and, since 2008, food engineer at the Swiss Cheesemaker's Association.

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**FRANCO SESSA**  
Grand Gourmand  
Auckland, New Zealand

Franco has 25 years of experience in the New Zealand dairy industry. He has judged dairy and non-dairy products in domestic and international contests for the past 15 years. He is also an approved trainer provider for the Academy of Cheese (UK).



**RUSSELL SMITH**  
Dairy Australia  
Bega, Australia

Russell brings over 25 years of experience judging cheese competitions across Australia and internationally. He now serves as the chief judge for the Australian Grand Dairy Awards.



**BEN SMITH**  
Hilmar  
Modesto, California

Ben is the Product Manager for Hilmar Cheese Company in California. He began making cheese in 2012 and has held roles in Operations, Research and Development, and Technical Services.



**DEAN SOMMER**  
Center for Dairy Research  
Madison, Wisconsin

Dean worked at Alto Dairy for 18 years in a series of technical positions including grading and evaluating cheese. Following that he has worked at the Center for Dairy Research for over 21 years as a cheese technologist



**SARAH STEWART**  
Neal's Yard Dairy  
London, United Kingdom

Sarah Stewart is Managing Director & partner of Neal's Yard Dairy. After 27 years at NYD, she has developed a depth of knowledge within the specialist cheese industry, with particular interest in selection and maturation.



**CATHY STRANGE**  
Whole Foods Market  
Austin, Texas

Cathy Strange is a world-renowned cheese expert, she led the Whole Foods Market program for 20+ years, judged in contests around the world and is committed to nurturing a deeper passion for cheese, producers and farmers.

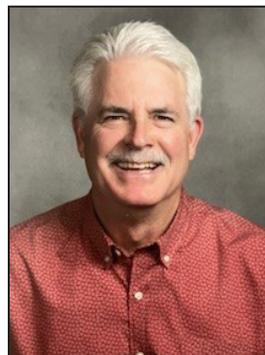
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## **ERNESTO TOALOMBO**

Colonia Láctica  
Quito, Ecuador

Ernesto is a food engineer who has worked in the production and consulting industry for cheeses in various countries for the last 16 years. He runs the company Colonial Láctica and participates as a cheese judge in Europe and the United States.



## **DON TRIBBY**

IFF  
Springfield, Missouri

Don is a Senior Account Manager for International Flavor & Fragrance. He has over 40 years experience in the dairy and food science industries. Don is a lead judge for the National Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest.



## **STEFAN TRUTTMANN FROMARTE**

Seelisberg, Switzerland

Stefan holds a master's degree in food science and has worked as a scientific assistant on a whey fermentation project, including scaling the process for industrial dairy production. Since 2015, he has served as quality manager at the Swiss Cheesemakers' Association.



## **MILNA TUDOR KALIT, PHD**

University of Zagreb  
Zagreb, Croatia

Milna is an Associate Professor at the University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture. She collaborates with the dairy industry on food safety and sensory quality assessment and has judged dairy products in Croatia and Germany.



## **PRATISHTHA VERMA**

Center for Dairy Research  
Madison, Wisconsin

Pratishtha has a master's degree in Dairy Manufacturing from South Dakota State University. Her research focused on identifying a natural antimicrobial released by predominant species within dairy membrane biofilms.



## **ERIC VORPAHL**

Masters Gallery Foods  
Plymouth, Wisconsin

Eric, having more than two decades of experience in the cheese and dairy industries, manages the bulk cheese procurement team and handles risk management for Masters Gallery Foods.

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**DR. RICHARD WEISS**  
Obersteirische Molkerei eGen  
Knittelfeld, Austria

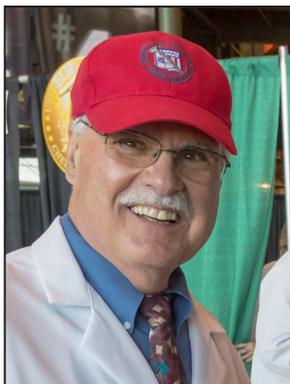
Richard has 23 years of experience in product development and cheese production, specializing in red-smear & foil-ripened cheese. He has been a part of the sensorics panel in different championships and has technical experience in food production plants



**JULIE WINANS**  
Novonesis  
Odgen, Utah

Julie has been the Dairy Product Contest Administrator for the Idaho Milk Processors Association for the last 16 years and has been in the industry for 19 years. She has been honored to judge the last four years at the Championship Cheese Contests.

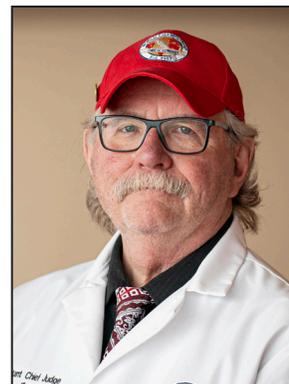
# CONTEST LEADERSHIP



Chief Judge  
**JIM MUELLER**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**TIM CZMOWSKI**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**STAN DIETSCHÉ**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**JOSEF HUBATSCHEK**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**JOHN JAECCI**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**MARIANA  
MARQUES DE ALMEIDA**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**SANDY TONEY**



Assistant Chief Judge  
**JILL ALLEN**



Director of Logistics  
**RANDY SWENSEN**