

Tastes of the Tableland festival a food lover's paradise

Daniel Strudwick Monday, October 17, 2011 © The Cairns Post

THE Tableland's annual food festival has drawn a record crowd again this year, showcasing the best from the region's food bowl and leaving a good taste in more than 5000 mouths.

As the 75 stallholders packed up yesterday afternoon, co-ordinator Trevor Duncan from Atherton Rotary declared this year's Tastes of the Tablelands the most successful in the event's four-year history. "The weather was quite good to us today and the highlight was having Alastair McLeod here to judge the chef's competition," Mr Duncan said. Mr McLeod, from Brisbane restaurant Bretts Wharf and Channel Seven's *Off the Eaten Track*, joined a panel of local judges that declared Bradley Jenkins the Tableland's best chef.

Mr Jenkins, the head chef at Rose Gums Wilderness Retreat at Malanda, won the blue ribbon for his oven-roasted pork belly, which judge Steven Gould described as "perfectly cooked". Mr Jenkins said every meal in his restaurant was cooked with locally sourced ingredients, which always yielded the best flavours.

"I think it's very important to source your ingredients from the local area and find ingredients that are picked within one or two days of when you use them," he said. "You can taste the difference."

He said he was less nervous about impressing the guest judge than he was about cooking against some of the Tableland's best chefs. Locals and visitors said they appreciated having the region's entire smorgasbord in one place to see and sample.

"I know all of the places that are here, but I haven't had a chance to go to them all myself," Dimbulah resident Christina Rizzetto said. Taste Paradise co-ordinator Nola Craig said people were always surprised by the diversity of produce grown on the Tableland. "It wasn't a good year for fruit and vegetables because of cyclone Yasi and then the cold winter, but the produce that was out today was very good and it was certainly a wide range," she said.

Kristian Richards' snags won him the title of Sausage King of the Tableland and Kyle Budge from Malanda Dairy Centre was the festival's best apprentice chef.



Mouth-watering: Judges Abigail Dennis, Alastair McLeod and Dorothy Richmond enjoy a dish during scoring. More than 5000 people attended the Tastes of the Tablelands. Picture: BRENDAN FRANCIS