



California Giant Berry Farms Announces First Annual Chef Invitational Winner

(WATSONVILLE, CA – July 15, 2018) California Giant Berry Farms held its first annual [Chef Invitational](#) at Tehama Golf Club on July 10, 2018, where Chef Luis Reyes from foodservice partner, Sysco Foods, took the title of Top Chef with his [berry tomato beet salad](#).

As a thank you for continued partnerships with California Giant Berry Farms, the company invited its foodservice partners and their chefs to showcase their skills and ingenuity in a new national foodservice event. California Giant Berry Farms congratulates Sysco and Chef Luis Reyes on winning the award at this inaugural event.

“From the moment the event kicked off upon the chefs’ arrival, to the field tours with our growers, to the delicious meal events each night, and the opportunity to meet and collaborate with our various partners – we couldn’t have asked for a better first Chef Invitational, and are we already looking forward to planning next year’s event,” says California Giant Foodservice Director, Tom Smith.

Five chefs from California Giant’s foodservice partners were selected from the many signature recipes submitted featuring at least two of the four berry types – strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries. Over 45 innovative recipes were submitted before the five chefs were chosen to make the trip to Monterey for the showdown at Tehama Golf Club. These five chefs re-created their dishes in front of a live audience and were critiqued by an esteemed panel of industry judges on recipe appearance, use of berries, flavor, and ease of preparation for the title of Top Chef. Guests in attendance also tasted each recipe and voted for a People’s Choice winner.

Chef finalists were accompanied by five talented volunteer teen chefs from the Teen Kitchen Project to prepare their dishes. The [Teen Kitchen Project](#) is a local non-profit organization based in Soquel, California whose mission is to invite teen chefs into a commercial kitchen to help prepare healthy meals for the community – specifically to those struggling from illness.

“Teen Kitchen Project Chefs were honored for the opportunity to work with the high caliber chefs participating in the Chef Invitational. Our teen chefs had a lot of fun cooking in a competitive environment for a change, and each had their favorite recipe and story to tell afterward. We are so grateful to Cal Giant and the team at Tehama for an experience we will all remember fondly,” says Teen Kitchen Project Executive Director, Angela Farley.

In addition to the edible California Giant berry display featured, the company also invited several local sponsors including [Alfaro Family Vineyard](#), [Odonata Wines](#), [B&R Farms](#), [Schoch Dairy Farmstead](#), [Ashby's Confections](#), [Dr. Shica's](#), and [The True Olive Connection](#) for guests to enjoy culinary tastings while the chef showdown unfolded.

Among the competing recipes were black and blue shrimp kinilaw from Ty Baloca, Renaissance Food Group; strawberry jalapeno pancakes with mixed berry syrup and duck wings from Shane Henderson, Markon; marinated wild boar with pickled berry salad from Matthew Lauer, Sysco; berry tomato beet salad from Luis Reyes, Sysco; and blueberry lavender financier with raspberry sorbet and blackberry compote from Laura Vaughn, US Foods. Each of the innovative recipes along with chef bio are highlighted on California Giant's new [foodservice page](#) of the website.

Chef Shane Henderson from Markon-Ben E. Keith mid-South took home the People's Choice award with his strawberry jalapeno pancakes and duck wings.

"The greatest aspect of the event was spending time in the fields with the growers and harvesters. Seeing the love and respect they had for the berries makes you understand and want to show that same respect from the point it leaves the farm, until it comes into my facility, until it is served on a plate and presented to guests. Cal Giant is a great partner from the field to the table," says Markon Chef and People's Choice winner, Shane Henderson.

Ultimately, it was Chef Luis Reyes from Sysco, Central Florida that impressed the judges with his colorful berry tomato beet salad that awarded him the title of Top Chef.

"The First Annual California Giant Berry Farms Chef Invitational was nothing less than first class. From the excellence of the ingredients, the field tours and interaction with the growers, the majestic venue, Chef David and Tehama staff, and most of all - the hospitality of the California Giant Family. It was an honor to have competed with great chefs and professionals. I am humbled and grateful to have represented Sysco, and to have taken home the win," says Sysco Chef, Luis Reyes.

In addition to the title of Top Chef, Chef Luis Reyes was awarded an all-expense trip to Monterey, California, worth up to \$3,000, paid registration to attend the PMA Foodservice Conference with California Giant Berry Farms with his recipe featured at the company's booth, a crystal engraved award, and \$250 cash.

"Now we look forward to our consumers recreating these chef-crafted recipes at home as we share them throughout social media, our website and blog," adds Smith. The company was very appreciative of the support received from their foodservice representatives providing access to their talented chefs, and all the volunteer judges and local sponsors for making the event possible.

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