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Mary Hawkes of Prescott, Ariz., Brings Home the “Best of Beef”

\$25,000 Grand Prize in 28th National Beef Cook-Off®

Sonoma Steaks with Vegetables Bocconcini Wowed Judges with “Sonoma Style” Flair

SONOMA, CALIF. (Sept. 24, 2009) – With her recipe for Sonoma Steaks with Vegetables Bocconcini, amateur home cook Mary Hawkes of Prescott, Ariz., won the 28th National Beef Cook-Off® \$25,000 “Best of Beef” grand prize, topping recipes from 14 other finalists. The competition awarded \$70,000 in total prize money.

This year’s Cook-Off “Sonoma Style” theme focused on fresh, flavorful ingredients paired with nutrient-rich beef cuts. The winning Sonoma Steaks with Vegetables Bocconcini recipe featured grilled beef top loin steaks, zucchini, yellow bell pepper and red grape tomatoes tossed with herb-marinated fresh mozzarella balls. In addition, the dish is an excellent source of protein, niacin, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, selenium and zinc; and a good source of iron.

Each contestant prepared their recipe for evaluation by a judging panel of local and national food journalists. Criteria included: taste, appearance, convenient preparation and nutritional balance. The judges raved about Hawkes’ recipe because of its overall simplicity, her efficient use of ingredients, and the mellow flavor and texture of the mozzarella balls partnered with the smoky grilled steak and vegetables.

The 2009 judges included: Michael Bauer, executive food and wine editor, *The San Francisco Chronicle*; Amy Sherman, cookbook author and blogger, *CookingWithAmy.com*; Betsy Wray, editor in chief, *Cooking Club* magazine; Jackie Plant, food and nutrition director, *Woman’s Day* magazine; and Niesha Lofing, food and family writer, *The Sacramento Bee*.

“I’m absolutely thrilled to be named the winner of this year’s Cook-Off,” said Hawkes. “The Sonoma Style theme really inspired me to look at new ways to pair my favorite cut of beef with garden-fresh vegetables.”

Funded by the Beef Checkoff Program, the National Beef Cook-Off showcases Americans’ love of beef. The Cook-Off promotes beef consumption by reaching consumers with appealing beef recipes that deliver on taste, health and convenience.

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“We’re delighted to name Mary Hawkes and her Sonoma Steaks with Vegetables Bocconcini recipe as the grand prize winner,” said Sherry Hill, National Beef Cook-Off program manager. “All of our finalists’ recipes were exceptional; perfect examples of how to combine fresh ingredients and nutritious beef in innovative ways.”

In addition to the “Best of Beef” Grand Prize, six cash prizes were awarded in three categories.

The winner in each category received \$10,000. This year’s category winners are:

- Live Well with Fast & Convenient Grilled Beef Recipes (\$10,000 prize): Kristina Vanni – Hollywood, Calif.
- Teens Cooking with Beef (\$10,000 prize): Morgan Hanrahan – Olympia, Wash.
- Lean Beef in Nutrient Rich One-Dish Meals (\$10,000 prize): Elizabeth Bennett – Mill Creek, Wash.

The runner-up in each category received \$5,000. This year’s runner-up winners are:

- Live Well with Fast & Convenient Grilled Beef Recipes (\$5,000 prize): Deborah Biggs – Omaha, Neb.
- Teens Cooking with Beef (\$5,000 prize): Erin Ozment – Purcell, Okla.
- Lean Beef in Nutrient Rich One-Dish Meals (\$5,000 prize): Fran Fehling – Staten Island, N.Y.

To view this year’s winning recipes visit: www.BeefCookOff.org.

National Beef Cook-Off® Chef Challenge

In a separate Cook-Off event, six professional chefs from the San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento counties competed head-to-head, showcasing their original beef dishes that portrayed “Sonoma Style” cooking.

The chef challenge was held on September 21, 2009 at Sally Tomatoes Event Center in neighboring Rohnert Park. The chefs competed for prizes totaling \$5,000. The grand prize winner was Carlo Cavallo, executive chef & proprietor, Meritage Restaurant in Sonoma, Calif. He received an all-expenses paid trip to the December 2009 Texas A&M University “Beef 101 Seminar.”

Erica Holland-Toll, executive chef, Ducca Restaurant in San Francisco, was honored with the People’s Choice Award, receiving one paid registration to the 2009 Culinary Institute of America’s Worlds of Flavor International Conference & Festival. Four additional first place winners each received \$500 in cash prizes.

Details of all chef challenge winners can be found at: www.BeefCookOff.org.

About the National Beef Cook-Off

The National Beef Cook-Off® is a Beef Checkoff Program that began in 1974 as an annual contest and changed to a biennial contest in 1993. The Cook-Off is managed and coordinated by the American National CattleWomen, Inc.

During its 35-year history, the Cook-Off has received accolades and the support of many notable culinary experts. The National Beef Cook-Off® is considered to be among the top three cooking contests in the nation.