



## From vanilla to saucy: Innovative new product and Kiwi classic win big at 2023 New Zealand Food Awards

**STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 11.30pm, Thursday 19 October 2023**

A vanilla that's anything but average took centre stage at the prestigious New Zealand Food Awards last night, alongside our favourite bit on the side - tomato sauce that is!

[Heilala Vanilla](#), 'the good vanilla' producer that is locally owned and operated was crowned as Massey University's 2023 Supreme Award winner for their new and innovative premium product, [Alcohol Free Vanilla Paste](#). The other big winner of the night was all-time Kiwi classic [Wattie's Tomato Sauce](#), who was awarded the Product Lifetime Achievement Award.

More than 350 guests attended the gala dinner at Auckland's Aotea Centre to celebrate excellence and innovation amongst Aotearoa New Zealand's food and beverage industry. This year attendees were invited to purchase finalists' products that were proudly displayed throughout the evening with all proceeds going to nominated charity, [KiwiHarvest](#).

KiwiHarvest were named the 2022 Food Hero winners – a title which recognises a business that continually supports Aotearoa's food and beverage industry. KiwiHarvest rescues between 170,000-200,000 kilograms of good quality surplus food every month and diverts it back to people who are struggling across the country.

KiwiHarvest Founder Deb Manning says it was an honour to be selected as the nominated charity.

"All funds raised will go towards our mission to reduce food waste and see nutritious food fulfilling its intended purpose – to nourish people across Aotearoa," Ms Manning says.

Heilala Vanilla won both the Pantry Award sponsored by Countdown and the Business Innovation Award sponsored by BNZ. Heilala Vanilla is a privately owned company with a sharp moral compass, and a commitment to actively investing in their communities. Sustainability is at the forefront of operations, and is weaved into everything they do, including a zero waste approach.

Co-founder of Heilala Vanilla Garth Boggis said it was a huge surprise to win three times given the amount of amazing food brands present on the night.

"The last two years we've been really focused on the post-COVID world – how we can innovate vanilla and there's a real opportunity to be set apart. We know vanilla is exciting, so bringing new products to community and consumers has been one way we've been able to do that. It's really about being true to your purpose: everything from making your product as good as it can be through to looking after your people as well as you can."

Heilala Vanilla's Marketing Manager Ruby Grant added, "It's bloody hard yards day to day but good things come to those who hustle. Sometimes it's the unexpected things – we didn't really have an alcohol free range and we weren't focused on it a couple of years ago but when an opportunity presents itself, take advantage of it and double down."

The national headquarters are in Tauranga but the true magic happens over in the Kingdom of Tonga where the vanilla is grown. Heilala Vanilla exists today because of an aid project that John Ross and his family founded in 2020 after the island was brutally ravaged by Cyclone Waka. After partnering with a local family in

the village of Utungake, a small vanilla plantation was established and the global humanitarian brand Heilala Vanilla was born.

The company's newest and award-winning product, Alcohol Free Vanilla Paste, is described by the judges as truly innovative and scored maximum points for both innovation and sustainability. It provides consumers with an alcohol-free alternative without compromising on taste – a rare achievement given the technical complexity involved in production. Heilala Vanilla have heavily invested into researching and developing their product range to ensure its latest addition is of the highest quality.

Head Judge Kay McMath says Heilala Vanilla now have affirmation of excellence following the vigorous judging process used in the awards, and by securing the top title of Massey University Supreme Award winner.

“Heilala Vanilla have developed a technically challenging vanilla paste by using a glycerine-extracted vanilla and then creating a formula that achieved a spoonable paste. The flavour is excellent, and the product delivers an innovative and sought after alternative to consumers.

“The product impressed in all areas of judging – excellence, innovation and sustainability, earning the highest score seen in the awards history. It's also provides the hospitality sector and retail markets with an alcohol-free alternative, while still matching the sensory profile of existing Heilala products,” Ms McMath says.

The Business Innovation judges praised Heilala Vanilla for being a proactive business leading the way for consumers.

“Innovation is reflected in every aspect of product, channel, brand and operations. Heilala Vanilla are a model company with a premium product, doing all they can to extend its positioning in a global market. Their success is a testament to the power of integrating inward technological investment, social values and quality ingredients.”

Wattie's Tomato Sauce, a classic Kiwi favourite, won the Product Lifetime Achievement Award sponsored byASUREQuality. The award, which was introduced in 2019, celebrates Kiwi products that have withstood the test of time, and its consumer loyalty is proof of the impact of its initial innovation.

Wattie's' Head of Marketing Justine Powell said that Wattie's is something we can all be proud of as New Zealanders.

“Wattie's is such an iconic business and brand, and tomato sauce is one of those things that's been on people's tables for generations. I grew up with it, my kids have grown up with it, and I think it's a true testament that it's been nominated tonight and we're super excited to have won, especially as we had some stiff competition.”

Another standout food producer was [EatKinda](#), who make frozen desserts out of the humble cauliflower! Not only does it taste good, it's good for the planet too as the cauliflower used would have been destined for landfill otherwise. EatKinda won both the Below Zero Award sponsored by FoodHQ for their Strawberry Swirl frozen dessert and the Novel Award sponsored by New Zealand Food Innovation Network for their Mint Choc Bikkie frozen dessert.

Other category winners included: -Mixed Roots “Hot Stuff” Curry Oil, winners of the Artisan Award sponsored by Cuisine, AVATAR's Mānuka Honey Elixir - Lemon & Mixed Berry Flavoured, winners of the Beverage Award sponsored by Massey University, Kāpiti's Succulent Summer Plum Yoghurt, winners of the Chilled Award sponsored by Countdown, Pure Food Co's Tiramisu, winners of the Health and Wellbeing Award sponsored by Palmerston North City Council; and Royalburn's Fine Lamb, winners of the Primary Sector Award sponsored by New Zealand Food Safety.

The New Zealand Food Awards have celebrated New Zealand's food and beverage manufacturers since 1987, focusing on innovation, sustainability and excellence. The awards are open to small and large food and beverage manufacturers, primary food producers, food service providers and ingredient supply companies.

Finalist and winning products earn the New Zealand Food Award's quality mark to highlight their technical capability, consumer acceptability, regulatory compliance, and food quality and safety to consumers and industry.

The awards programme is made possible with the support of Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University, Countdown, Cuisine, Palmerston North City Council, BNZ, New Zealand Food Safety, FoodHQ, New Zealand Food Innovation Network, AsureQuality, FMCG Business, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, The New Zealand Institute of Food Science & Technology Inc., XPO Exhibitions and Villa Maria.

## **2023 winners**

### **Artisan Award – Sponsored by Cuisine**

Mixed Roots – “Hot Stuff” Curry Oil

### **Below Zero Award – Sponsored by FoodHQ**

EatKinda – EatKinda Strawberry Swirl

### **Beverage Award – Sponsored by Massey University**

AVATAR → Mānuka Honey Elixir - Lemon & Mixed Berry Flavoured

### **Business Innovation Award – Sponsored by BNZ**

Heilala Vanilla

### **Chilled Award – Sponsored by Countdown**

Kāpiti – Succulent Summer Plum Yoghurt

### **Health and Wellbeing Award – Sponsored by Palmerston North City Council**

Pure Food Co – Tiramisu

### **Lifetime Achievement Award – Sponsored by AsureQuality**

Wattie's – Tomato Sauce

### **Novel Award – Sponsored by New Zealand Food Innovation Network**

EatKinda – EatKinda Mint Choc Bikkie

### **Pantry Award – Sponsored by Countdown**

Heilala Vanilla – Alcohol Free Vanilla Paste

### **Primary Sector Award – Sponsored by New Zealand Food Safety**

Royalburn – Fine Lamb

### **Supreme Award – Sponsored by Massey University**

Heilala Vanilla – Alcohol Free Vanilla Paste

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