

Sharing a passion for cooking

By **SALLY RAE**

PROMINENT chef Graham Hawkes may have notched up 50 years in the hospitality industry but his passion for food has not diminished.

Invercargill-based Mr Hawkes, who is consulting chef to Beef + Lamb New Zealand and corporate chef for Alliance Group, describes it as the most exciting profession in the world.

Much has changed in the industry over that five-decade involvement, he told cookery students studying at the Otago Polytechnic Central campus.

The students were preparing beef and lamb to serve at a dinner following the Central South Island Farmer Council annual meeting in Cromwell.

Mr Hawkes' interest in food began at a very young age and he remembered being at his grandparents' house when he was 8 and wanting ice cream.

There was no freezer in the house and his grandmother told him that if he wanted ice cream, he would have make it himself, which included milking the cow to begin the process. That was his very first cookery lesson.

He was very grateful to have had the opportunity, subsequently, to spend time in the kitchen, with both his grandmothers, during weekends and school holidays.

When Mr Hawkes first started his apprenticeship, the dinner menu in restaurants was usually roasts of beef, lamb, pork and chicken and one other dish, the likes of corned silverside or pickled ox tongue.

There had been a "whole pendulum change" in the years since and there were now wonderful, innovative ways to produce red meat.

Back in those early years, no-one served rack of lamb and lamb shanks were reserved for dog tucker. It was meat that was produced for the domestic market, not for export.

Now, every part of the animal was being better utilised and served up and it was export quality meat that was available.

Mr Hawkes, who is also chief judge of the Glammies — Beef + Lamb New Zealand Golden Lamb Awards — was passionate about red meat.

He was delighted to see the polytechnic students being given an opportunity to use high quality beef and lamb and learn more about it.

"You show it respect, it in turn will give you the respect you want on the plate. Take your time and take care cooking it and it will take time to give you the result at the other end and give . . . a fantastic dining experience," he said.

This year, he created a resource for the industry, in the form of a seminar — and trained 20 people to deliver it — which was about getting better use of beef and lamb cuts.

It was very simple but effective, he said.





Chewing the fat . . .Graham Hawkes (left) and Otago Polytechnic Central campus chef lecturer Bill McDonald talk cooking. PHOTO: GREGOR RICHARDSON