



A community scheme producing vegetables in the heart of the city, a restaurant providing training for the long-term unemployed and a campaigning nine-year-old blogger are among the food heroes celebrated in this year's Observer Food Monthly awards, which were announced in London on Thursday night.

Voted for by over 16,000 Observer readers alongside an expert panel, this year's crop very much recognises the age of economic austerity and the need to take food back to the grass roots. "With a higher number of voters than ever before, with expert judges from most parts of the UK, the OFM awards have never felt so representative or relevant," says OFM editor Allan Jenkins.

Among the pioneers voted for by the readers of OFM is Growing Communities, a vegetable box scheme based in Hackney and run by volunteers producing most of its food locally, which was named retailer of the year. Create, a restaurant in Leeds providing training and work placements in the catering industry for the unemployed, won best ethical restaurant, while the Parlour, a pub in Chorlton on the outskirts of Manchester, beat tough competition from glossy celebrity-chef-run ventures to be named the best place for Sunday lunch.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall won best cookbook for *Veg Every Day!*, another clear nod to the modern age of austerity at a time of rising meat prices. Nigel Slater was named food personality of the year.

The expert judging panel – which included chefs Angela Hartnett, Shaun Hill from the Walnut Tree in Wales and Simon Hulstone from the Elephant in Torquay – gave the blog of the year award, chosen from a shortlist voted for by readers, to Martha Payne, a nine-year-old from Argyll and Bute. Payne used her *Never Seconds* school dinners blog to ignite debate around

school food. Payne has raised over £100,000 for school kids in Malawi in the process.

"Martha demonstrated there is more to food blogging than moaning about Michelin stars or drooling over dirty burgers," says Allan Jenkins, chair of the expert panel. There was also a lifetime achievement award for restaurateur Sir Terence Conran for his contribution to the industry, and an outstanding achievement award for Raymond Blanc.