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Sixth Southern Regional Dairy Challenge Draws 50 Students From 10 Schools

A total of 50 students from 10 southern colleges and universities participated in the sixth annual Southern Regional Dairy Challenge, which was held November 17 through 19, 2011, in Live Oak, Florida. The Southern Regional Dairy Challenge is an innovative two-day event designed by professionals from allied industry and university educators to bring classroom training to life in the real world for students preparing for dairy careers.

The University of Florida hosted the 2011 contest, drawing participants from Alabama A&M University, Berry College, Clemson University, College of the Ozarks, University of Florida, Louisiana State University, North Carolina State University, Santa Fe College, Virginia Tech, and West Virginia University.

“The regional Dairy Challenge, while offering a competitive format, educates undergraduate students about the dairy industry itself and allows them to apply the concepts they have learned in the classroom to a real farm situation, prioritize their recommendations, and then defend their practical recommendations,” says contest planning committee chair Donna Amaral-Phillips of the University of Kentucky. “Students, our sponsors, judges and coaches all learn a great deal in the process.”

One Star Platinum Foundation Sponsor, Southern Regional Committee member, and Southern contest judge Dave Whitlock with Select Sire Power added, "Being a sponsor and attending the Southern Dairy Challenge allows me to see the future leaders of the dairy industry in action, gaining experience, and working together makes me excited about the future of our industry."

A key objective is to present students with a real-life situation that stresses the importance of teamwork and professionalism. Teams of students from the different schools were formed to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of a working dairy farm. Afterwards, teams presented their analysis and prioritized opportunities for improvement to a panel of expert judges and the dairy owners. Hosts for this year's Southern Regional Dairy Challenge were Keith Shiver, Shiver Dairy Farm, Mayo, FL and Ashley Bailey, Lafayette Dairy, Mayo, FL.

What They Did During The Challenge

Students arrived at Camp Weed & Cervency Conference Center, in Live Oak, FL on the evening of November 17. After check-in and registration, participants were split into 12 mixed-university

teams. Teams got to know each other over dinner and then participated in team-building exercises led by Dave Winston from Virginia Tech. Winston worked with students to discover their teams' strengths and capabilities, examine ingredients of effective teams, and evaluate team members' personality styles. Later that evening, teams received detailed production, financial, nutrition and reproduction records. The students had about an hour and a half to review the material and start forming their team strategies.

On Friday morning, the teams left for their farm visit to evaluate cows, facilities and management practices. After a two-hour farm visit, teams returned to the Conference Center to analyze their data and develop recommendations for improvement. Each team prepared a 20-minute presentation that detailed their observations and suggestions. The evening concluded with a dinner and Ag Olympics games at the Suwannee County Extension Office to provide the students a chance to relax show off their other skills. The dinner and games were organized by the University of Florida Dairy Science Club.

On the program's final day, each team presented its evaluation and recommendations to a panel of industry judges. Teams were ranked as platinum, reserve platinum, gold, or silver, based on how well they worked as a team and how effectively their presentations of strengths and opportunities for the dairy operation matched the judges' evaluations. When teams were not presenting, they toured the Dairy Production Systems – Branford dairy farm in Branford, FL. The Dairy Challenge ended with dinner, and awards ceremony at the Conference Center.

The 12 teams were named after major Dairy Challenge platinum sponsors: ABS Global Inc., Dairy Farmers of America, Dairy Production Systems, Dairy Records Management Systems, DSM Nutritional Products, Farm Credit, Genex Cooperative Inc., Land O'Lakes Purina Feed, Alltech Inc., Pfizer Animal Health, Select Sires Inc., and Southern States Cooperative.

Receiving Platinum Awards were:

Christie Burke, Louisiana State University; Alison Craine, Berry College; Erin Henley, Virginia Tech; Angela Stuart, Alabama A & M University

Rachel Manning, West Virginia University; Lauren Mayo, University of Florida; Lauryn Singer, Virginia Tech; Colton Turner, Alabama A & M University

Receiving Reserve Platinum Awards were:

Mae Dunn, Alabama A & M University; Ben Ketchie, North Carolina State University; Kaitlin MaGill, Berry College; Kaylee Quinn, Clemson University; Ben Smith, Virginia Tech

Elizabeth Eckelkamp, Louisiana State University; Chris Potts, Virginia Tech; Chase Rucks, Santa Fe College; Emma Schaffel, Clemson University

Receiving Gold Awards were:

Nikita Armstrong, Alabama A & M University; Sarah Burczynski, Virginia Tech; Andrea Steyer, West Virginia University; Claire Stuyck, Clemson University

Kaylene Lyons, Berry College; Cody Meyer, College of the Ozarks; Cory Robbins, North Carolina State University; Vaughn Stevenson, Clemson University

Janae Matthews, Alabama A & M University; Robin Nolan, Berry College; Abby Patch, Virginia Tech; Jodie Rose, West Virginia University

Lauren Clemency, North Carolina State University; Brenson Crenshaw, Alabama A & M University; Lindsay Hetrick, Virginia Tech; Nathan Leckie, Clemson University; Kenneth Sharp, Berry College

Receiving Silver Awards were:

Karl Paulson, Virginia Tech; Martha Peterson, Alabama A & M University; Carmen Riguero, Berry College; Alex Swain, University of Florida

Caitlin Coriasso, Alabama A & M University; Justin McEntyre, North Carolina State University; Ty Rowland, College of the Ozarks; Grace Skaff, West Virginia University

Alyssa Degreenia, North Carolina State University; Kelly Jo Johnson, Virginia Tech; Gairy Kimber, Alabama A & M University; Leah Moore, Berry College

Phillip Gunter, Clemson University; Michael Hemme, College of the Ozarks; Carrie Hoffner, North Carolina State University; Matthew Scott, Louisiana State University

About Dairy Challenge

The Southern Regional is one of four regional contests under the guidance and support of the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge (NAIDC). The NAIDC mission is to facilitate education, communication and an exchange of ideas among students, agribusiness, dairy producers and universities that enhances the development of the dairy industry and its leaders. The 2012 national Dairy Challenge contest will be held March 29-31 in Roanoke, Virginia. The 2012 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge will be hosted by Clemson University and held November 15-17.

Financial support for the NAIDC comes from generous contributions from dairy industry companies, association and foundations, and dairy business owners. NAIDC is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. Contributions to Dairy Challenge are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. For more information on sponsorship support, visit www.dairychallenge.org or contact Executive Director Molly Kelley at (217) 684-3007 or email: naidcmjk@aol.com.

Editors: Photos at http://www.dairychallenge.org/so_event.php and <http://www.facebook.com/#!/DairyChallenge>