

# Genex, Employees and Members Support Youth through Dairy Challenge

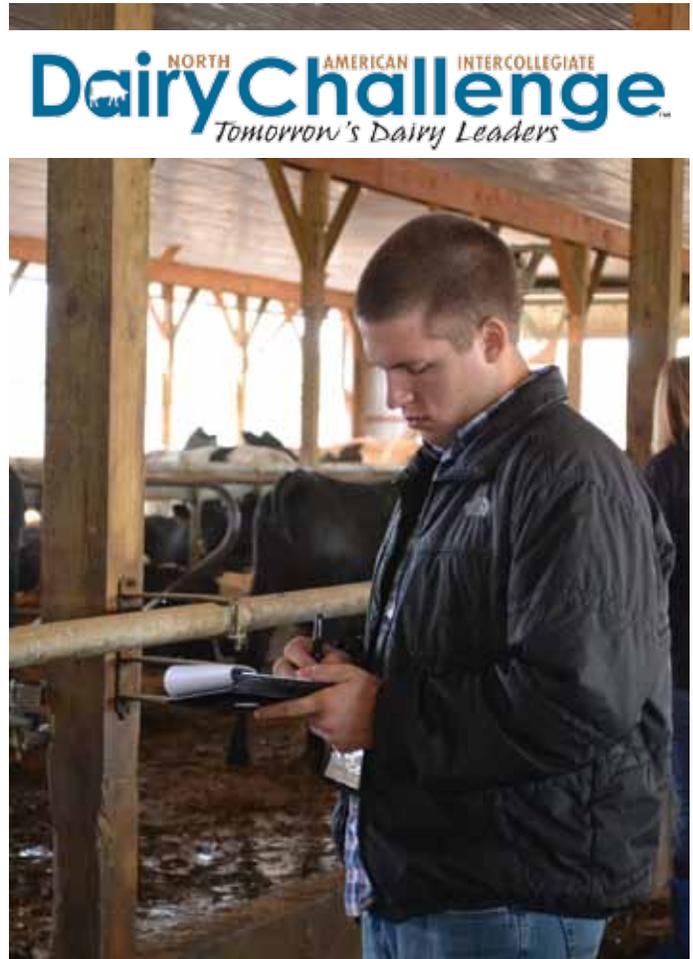
Cooperatives follow seven cooperative principles. The focus of the seventh principle is concern for community. Throughout this “Cooperative in the Community” series, learn how Genex and Genex staff demonstrate support for their local communities and the agricultural community.

The North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge is a non-profit organization hosting contests tailored to tomorrow’s dairy leaders. As former Dairy Challenge participant Ashley Sprengeler describes, “Dairy Challenge provides a unique hands-on approach to teaching students how to apply and connect their education to real-life situations in the dairy industry. Through Dairy Challenge, students improve their dairy management, communication and overall business skills.” Sprengeler now uses those same skills in her career as the Genex Marketing Support Specialist.

In its 10 years, Dairy Challenge has helped prepare over 3,000 students for careers in the dairy industry. The contests held annually on regional and national levels attract college students from across the United States and Canada. At each event, students are grouped in four-person teams. They receive cow production and farm management data from a real-life dairy and then get to meet the dairy owners and employees, ask questions, and personally observe the farm’s routines, feed, cattle housing, etc. Following the on-farm evaluation, each team develops an analysis of the farm’s operations. This includes recommendations for improvements in nutrition, reproduction, milking procedures, animal health, housing and/or financial management. Each team of students presents their farm analysis and recommendations to a panel of judges as well as the farm’s management team.

“Participating in Dairy Challenge taught me the ‘truth’ about the dairy industry,” says Jon Myers, Genex Breeding Program Specialist from Gouverneur, N.Y., who participated in the regional and national competitions. “In school, you are taught how things are supposed to work and how the numbers are supposed to add up. Through Dairy Challenge you begin to see what works for one dairy may not work for another. Every dairy is different.”

Genex, our employees and our members are proud to support Dairy Challenge because of these positive impacts on tomorrow’s dairy leaders.



## Genex – Providing Financial Support

Genex is a foundation sponsor having annually donated monetary funds and/or in-kind gifts towards to the Dairy Challenge since its inception. “We support Dairy Challenge because the future of the dairy industry is the future of Genex,” explains Terri Dallas, Vice President of Information & Public Relations. “It is also an investment in employee development as several past participants are now employed by the cooperative.”

## Employees – Offering People Power

Genex employees have volunteered their time to serve on the Dairy Challenge board of directors, organize regional and national contests, and act as contest judges.

“It was a great honor to be a judge,” explains Pete Weber, Genex National Account Manager. “I served on a panel of judges with some of the industry’s finest veterinarians,



(Top) Students ask questions during the northeast Dairy Challenge at Murcrest Farms. (Bottom) Students analyze manure in a pasture at Shiver's Dairy Farm during the southern Dairy Challenge.

financial planners, nutritionists, herd managers and CEOs. Having judges from so many areas of expertise even helped me see the dairies from a new perspective.”

Similarly, Genex Area Sales Manager Ed Silba thought the opportunity to judge alongside other industry professionals was eye opening. However, “the major high from the contest was the teams’ presentations and the realization that the future of dairy is in very good hands.”

Amy te Plate-Church, Genex National Alliance Manager, represents Genex on the Dairy Challenge board of directors because she enjoys giving back to the industry.

### Members – Hosting and Learning

Genex members have welcomed the chance to play an important role in educating tomorrow’s dairy leaders and at the same time have benefitted from the students’ analyses of their operations.

“Dairy Challenge is an outstanding program for both students and the host farms,” explains Lynn Murray,

owner of Murcrest Farms in Copenhagen, N.Y., who served as a host for the 2011 northeast regional Dairy Challenge. “It allows students to see real-life situations on real-life farms. At the same time, it was great for our dairy. I had 40 students here virtually acting in the role of consultants along with several industry professionals. That totals about 45 consultants on our farm in one day – how can it get any better than that!”

Genex board member Ron Totten of Stafford, N.Y., served as a host for the 2010 northeast Dairy Challenge and was equally impressed. “The students arrived at the farm, we were introduced, and then they took off. Each one knew exactly what they wanted to do. They were measuring barns and feed bunks, counting the cows in different groups, and asking very well thought out questions.”

Totten pointed out that the students picked up on an issue he was already aware of – overcrowded dry cows – but they also brought new issues to his attention. “The students noticed the automatic milking units came off too slowly. By analyzing a scatter graph of somatic cell counts per cow, they also recommended we cull some high somatic cell cows especially since we have an abundance of heifers.”

Murray categorized the teams’ recommendations for Murcrest Farms into two types. “There were the more obvious issues that all teams picked up on, and then there were more subtle issues that only a few discovered.”

An example of an obvious issue included the need to determine what to do with their abundance of heifers. The students recommended Murray either sell animals or look into building additional barns. His example of a more subtle issue was that of transferring the farm to the next generation. “Only a few groups picked up on our need to begin planning and partaking in the process of transferring farm ownership to my son and daughter-in-law.”

Keith Shiver, owner of Shiver’s Dairy Farm in Mayo, Fla., and host for the 2011 southern regional contest, simply shared that the students reinforced what his dairy’s strengths and weaknesses are. “The students confirmed some things I know I need to change around my operation.”

Sponsors, volunteers, owners of host farms and participants all agree Dairy Challenge is a unique and important hands-on method of educating tomorrow’s dairy leaders. “This is the future of ag,” notes Murray. “Soon, these youth will be on farms; they will be our nutritionists, veterinarians and crop people.”