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Third Southern Regional Dairy Challenge Draws 54 Students From 12 Schools

A total of 54 students from 12 southern colleges and universities participated in the third annual Southern Regional Dairy Challenge, November 20 through 22 in Statesville, N.C.

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.

North Carolina State University hosted the 2008 contest, drawing participants from Alabama A&M University, Berry College, Clemson University, Ferrum College, University of Florida, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and Western Kentucky University.

"The regional Dairy Challenge, while offering a competitive format, is more about educating students about dairy farm evaluation and working with students from other universities," says contest planning committee chair Dave Winston of Virginia Tech. "Students learn a great deal in the process."

A key objective, Winston, continued, is to present students with a real-life situation that stresses the importance of teamwork and professionalism. Teams of students from the different universities 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 Reid Gray, of Grayhouse Farms, Stoney Point, N.C., and Dennis Leamon, owner of Lucky L Jerseys near Statesville.

What They Did During The Challenge

Students arrived at the Holiday Inn conference center on the afternoon of November 20. After check-in and registration, participants were split into mixed-university teams. Teams got to know each other over dinner and then participated in team-building exercises led by Dave Winston. Winston worked with students to discover their teams' strengths and capabilities, examine ingredients of effective teams, and evaluate team members' personality styles. "I was impressed with the camaraderie that developed among students from different institutions after only being together for such a short period of time," comments Winston.

The next morning, teams received detailed production, financial, nutrition and reproduction records, and left for their farm visit to evaluate cows, facilities and management practices. After a two-hour farm visit, teams returned to the hotel 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 dinner at the Iredell County Ag Center, following by bowling at Statesville's Plamor Lanes.

On the program's final day, each team presented its evaluation and recommendations to a panel of industry judges. Teams were ranked as 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 farm they had not evaluated for the competition.

The Dairy Challenge ended with dinner, entertainment and an awards ceremony at Stamey Farms in Statesville. Participants and coaches were welcomed by Dr. Todd See, head of the Animal Science Department at North Carolina State University, who congratulated them on their excellent performance throughout the event.

Awards

Dairy Challenge teams are named in recognition of sponsoring businesses and organizations. Receiving first place Platinum awards were:

- **Team Select Sire Power:** Aaron Horst, Virginia Tech; Matt McCombs, West Virginia University; Brittany Mixson, Clemson University; Felicia Taylor, Western Kentucky University; and Allison Vignes, Louisiana State University.

- **Team American Dairy Science Association:** Natalie Davis, Louisiana State University; Samantha Davis, Virginia Tech; Jennifer Devine, Berry College; Jessica Leonard, North Carolina State University, and Andrew Mains, University of Kentucky.

Second place Platinum awards went to:

- **Team Southern States Cooperative:** Abby Burns, North Carolina State University; Keegan Gay, University of Kentucky; Hayley Hollier, Louisiana State University; Ivy Roberts, Berry College; and Decima Washington, Alabama A&M.
- **Team Genex:** Ryan Haines, Virginia Tech, LaQuanda Hall, Alabama A&M University, Amy Hoback, Ferrum College; and Candace Munz, University of Florida.

Gold award teams were:

- **Team Dairy Farmers of America:** Randi Black, University of Kentucky; Kari Botkin, Ferrum College; Ashley Fairchild, North Carolina State University; and Jessie Nickerson, West Virginia State University.
- **Team ABS Global:** Sara Coleman, Clemson University; Karl Wesley Henry, Jr., Alabama A&M University; Amanda Holaday, Western Kentucky University; Amanda Stowers, Mississippi State University; and Marlene Tremblay, University of Kentucky.
- **Team New Frontier Bank:** Katherine Anderson, Ferrum College; Nancy Chenault, University of Kentucky; Ashley Massagee, University of Florida; Christopher Ragland, Alabama A&M University; and Anthony Roe, Western Kentucky University.
- **Team Zinpro Performance Minerals:** Megan Bullard, Mississippi State University, Stephanie Croyule, University of Florida, Simone Kennedy, Clemson University; Lucas Krueger, Alabama A&M University; and Autumn Spencer, Ferrum College.

Teams receiving Silver awards were:

- **Team Southeast DHIA, Inc:** Morgan Bullard, Mississippi State University; Ashley Dozier, Alabama A&M University; Laura Gaver, Virginia Tech; and Beth Hudson, Western Kentucky University.
- **Team Merial Ltd.:** Ethan Bloomfield, West Virginia University; Mallory Edison, Berry College; Ana Ferrer, Mississippi State University; Brandi Roebuck, Alabama A&M University.
- **Team Dairy Production Systems:** Sarah Baker-Walker, Berry College; Deirdre Bowie, Alabama A&M University; C.J. Middleton, University of Florida; and Brandy Puckett, Ferrum College.
- **Team Agway Foundation:** Kristen Glosson, North Carolina State University; Leslie Johnson, Alabama A&M University; Sarah Pogue, Berry College; and Sarah Thomas, Western Kentucky University.

Afterwards, most students echoed the comments of one individual who said, "This was a great program overall and had great experiences that will benefit me in the future."

About Dairy Challenge

Eastern Kentucky University, Western Kentucky University, and the University of Kentucky will jointly host the 2009 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge. To become a Southern Regional sponsor, contact Gary Hay at ghay@agcenter.lsu.edu. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Contributing sponsors are recognized on the Dairy Challenge web site, as well as programs and news stories issued throughout the year.

The Southern Regional is one of four regional contests under the guidance and support of the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge. 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 2009 national Dairy Challenge contest will be held March 27 and 28 in Syracuse, N.Y. For more information, visit www.dairychallenge.org or contact Molly J. Kelley, Executive Director, at naidc@wdexpo.com.

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