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Fourth Southern Regional Dairy Challenge Draws 76 Students From 16 Schools

A total of 76 students from 16 southern colleges and universities participated in the fourth annual Southern Regional Dairy Challenge, November 19 through 21 in Russellville, KY. 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 Kentucky, Western Kentucky University, and Eastern Kentucky University co-hosted the 2009 contest, drawing participants from Alabama A&M University, Berry College, Clemson University, College of the Ozarks, Eastern Kentucky University, Lake City Community College, University of Florida, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, Santa Fe College, Southern Illinois University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and Western Kentucky University.

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

Maury Cox, Executive Director of the Kentucky Dairy Development Council, described the Southern Dairy Challenge as a "first class event that provided great interaction with dairy industry mentors and leaders of tomorrow. It was personally rewarding to see such enthusiastic, professional young people."

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 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 Jimmy and Andy Woodall, Lewisburg, KY and Lee, Denise, Adam, Chris, and Eli Robey, Adairville, KY.

What They Did During The Challenge

Students arrived at the Logan County Extension Office on the evening of November 19. 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 from Virginia Tech University. 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. Later that evening, teams received detailed production, financial, nutrition and reproduction records. 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 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 an Ag Olympics event at the Logan County Extension Office to provide the student a chance to relax through a lighter competition including events such as a feed sack race and a hay bale toss. 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 the Logan County Extension Office.

Awards

Dairy Challenge teams are named in recognition of sponsoring businesses and organizations.

Receiving first place Platinum awards were:

- **Team Logan County DHIA:** Courtney Wilson, Eastern Kentucky University; Dustin Phipps, Virginia Tech University; Angel Henderson, Mississippi State University; Jessica Leonard, North Carolina State University; Jake Anderson, Louisiana State University.

- **Team Neogen Corporation:** Wesley Dyer, Western Kentucky University; Elaine Suever, Mississippi State University; Allison Vignes, Louisiana State University; Marissa Navarro, University of Florida; Samantha Schell, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

Second place Platinum awards went to:

- **Team Venture Milling-Precision Dairy Nutrition:** Ethan Bloomfield, West Virginia University; Lucas Krueger, Alabama A&M University; Brandi Walker, Mississippi State University; Alex Steer, Virginia Tech University.

- **Team Kentucky Dairy Development Council:** Brady Core, University of Kentucky; Mallory Eidson, Berry College; Sara Neumeister, Eastern Kentucky University; Danielle Perkins, Alabama A&M University; Emily Hetherington, Santa Fe College.

Gold award teams were:

- **Team Dairy Farmers of America Southeast Council:** Anthony Bonazza, Berry College; Curtis Coombs, University of Kentucky; Kelley Johnson, University of Florida; Zach Lyons, Virginia Tech University; Ana Ferrer, Mississippi State University.

- **Team Land O'Lakes Purina Feed:** Seth Mizell, Louisiana State University; Frank Smody, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale; Amelia Teague, Berry College; Beka Chmielewski, University of Kentucky; Rachel Pomeroy, North Carolina State University.

- **Team Renaissance Nutrition:** Dare Shepherd, Virginia Tech University; Hayley Hollier, Louisiana State University; Kimberly Hencken, University of Florida; Brittiany Pool, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

- **Team EstroTECT, Inc.:** Leslie Hash, Clemson University; Adam Parsons, North Carolina State University; Timothy Stroud, College of the Ozarks; Ashleigh Thomas, Mississippi State University; Deborah Mondt, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

- **Team Robey Farms:** Matt McCombs, West Virginia University; Clint Cambre, Louisiana State University; Patricia Fledderman, University of Florida; Tabitha Crouch, Clemson University; Decima Washington, Alabama A&M University.

- **Team Evonik Degussa:** Rosemary Liskey, Virginia Tech University; Ashley Fairchild, North Carolina State University; Katelyn Hlusko, West Virginia University; Katie Sheaffer, University of Kentucky; Andrea Sassard, Clemson University.

Teams receiving Silver awards were:

- **Team Winchester Farms (Kroger):** Leslie Johnson, Alabama A&M University; Janet Deem, West Virginia University; Nathaniel Keith, Eastern Kentucky University; Sarah Cashion, Mississippi State University.

- **Team Select Sire Power:** Jason Bolte, College of the Ozarks; David Kirkland, Santa Fe College; Desnatie Reynolds, Alabama A&M University; Kristen Glosson, North Carolina State University; Ivy Roberts, Berry College.

- **Team DSM:** Weldon Nipper, Louisiana State University; Kristin Heilmeier, University of Kentucky; Lauren Ellison, Lake City Community College; Curtis Rhoderick, Virginia Tech University.

- **Team ABS Global:** Beth Hudson, Western Kentucky University; Jennifer Devine, Berry College; Carilynn Gravatte, University of Kentucky; Ashley Dozier, Alabama A&M University; Eric Isley, North Carolina State University.

- **Team Arm and Hammer Animal Nutrition:** James Patrick Allen, Eastern Kentucky University; Rachel Smith, Virginia Tech University; Nicholas Jenkins, University of Florida; Aaron Crutcher, Alabama A&M University.

- **Team Alltech, Inc.:** Jessie Nickerson, West Virginia University; James Pearson, North Carolina State University; Candace Munz, University of Florida; John Baston, Western Kentucky University; Heather Wright, Alabama A&M University.

Afterwards, most students echoed the comments of one individual who said, "This was a great experience dealing with the dairy industry, developing and participating in a team, and analyzing data. Also, it was a good way to relate the classes taken at school to a 'real world' setting." Another individual stated that "this was by far one of the highlights of my college experience. The chance to interact with students from all over the southern region as well as a variety of farm managers and industry professionals was invaluable."

About Dairy Challenge

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.

Mississippi State University will host the 2010 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 2010 North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge™ contest will be held April 8-10 in Visalia, California. For more information, visit www.dairychallenge.org or contact Molly J. Kelley, Executive Director, at naidc@wdexpo.com.

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