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Dairy Challenge teaches students problem solving for the real world

LEXINGTON, Ky., (Sept. 17, 2009) – College students from the southern United States will gather in Russellville, Ky., in mid-November to gain real-world, problem-solving skills and compete in a unique competition called Dairy Challenge.

The University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, along with Eastern Kentucky University and Western Kentucky University, will host the Southern Regional Dairy Challenge, Nov. 19 to 21.

“The Dairy Challenge will offer students a multitude of opportunities,” said Jeffrey Bewley, Dairy Systems Management extension specialist in the UK College of Agriculture. “They have the opportunity to learn about the dairy industry and to find potential employers within the industry. And they will meet people who can help them further their education. They also have the opportunity to create lasting friendships with other young people interested in the dairy industry.”

Bewley said students will break into teams of four to six working with individuals from different institutions. They will walk through a local dairy, ask dairy owners questions about their operations and analyze farm data to come up with management recommendations for the dairy. They use all the information to create a PowerPoint presentation for a panel of dairy industry judges. After the presentations, the judges evaluate and rank each team’s presentation and recommendations.

“We also work to team up less experienced students with more experienced students so they learn from each other as well,” Bewley said. “Teamwork, learning, confidence and relationships happen and industry professionals get to see our future dairy leaders in action and see their potential for contributing to the industry as they enter the workforce.”

Past UK Dairy Challenge team member Andrew Mains was quick to offer praise of the event.

“The Dairy Challenge was definitely a learning experience for me,” said Mains, a UK alumnus who participated in the Dairy Challenge in 2008 and 2009. “Being an agricultural economics major and not coming from a dairy background, the Dairy Challenge was a way for me to learn about this industry. It also allowed me to visit many dairy farms and see a wide variety of management styles. This contest also allowed me to meet people who helped me see this industry from a new perspective.”

The North American Dairy Challenge was established in 2002 as a management contest to incorporate a higher-learning atmosphere with practical application to help prepare students for careers in the dairy industry. More than 1,500 students have enhanced their dairy management,

communication and business skills through the Dairy Challenge, in turn generating highly qualified graduates to lead and further improve the dairy industry.

Financial support for the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge and its regional contests comes from generous contributions from dairy industry companies, associations and foundations, and dairy business owners. NAIDC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, and contributions to Dairy Challenge are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

To learn about the many opportunities to become involved with the NAIDC program, contact Executive Director Molly Kelley at 217-684-3007. For more information about the 2008 southern regional event, contact Donna Amaral-Phillips at 859-257-7542, Jenks Britt at 270-745-6585, Laurie Rincker at 859-622-2231, or Jeffrey Bewley at 859-257-7543.

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