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Collegiate students participate in 15th annual Western Regional Dairy Challenge®

68 students from nine Western U.S. universities and one Canadian college traveled to Modesto, California, for the 15th annual Western Dairy Challenge on February 20 – 22, 2020. The contest was hosted by Modesto Junior College.

The Western Regional Dairy Challenge is a three-day educational competition designed to prepare students for dairy careers. Working in mixed-university teams of four or five students, participants assessed all aspects of a working dairy farm, including facilities, nutrition, financials, reproduction and animal health. Students collaborated on a 20-minute team presentation that detailed their observations and suggestions to a panel of judges. Teams were ranked based on how well their evaluations matched the judges' evaluations of the dairy operation.

On Thursday students learned about the structure of function of Hilmar Cheese at the Hilmar Cheese Visitor Center. Next, students participated in a team building event, where they met their teammates from other universities and competed in these teams to make cheese. As part of the team building exercise, they competed to determine which team had the highest yielding cheese production. They also kicked off the competition portion of the and spent the evening diving into the host dairy's records to assess the strengths and weaknesses that show up in the numbers.

On Friday morning, the teams headed out to the local host dairy that graciously opened their doors to the students. They spent 3 1/2 hours walking the facility, observing the cows and the management aspects of the operation. Following the on-farm assessment, the students participated in a question and answer session with the owner of the dairy. Sponsors and volunteers attending the event networked with and mentored the students throughout the weekend.

On Saturday morning, students presented their findings to a panel of judges made up of a nutritionist, a veterinarian, a financial analyst and a dairy producer who ranked them on their presentation and conclusions. Students also had the opportunity to hear the judging panel's full critique of the dairy's opportunities to round out this learning experience.

1st Place Teams:

Team 6 - Strawberry

Rebecca Hedges (University of Alberta), Lars Schilderink (Cal Poly State University - SLO), Katelin Baker (Washington State University), Anthony Buzzetti (University of Idaho), Madison Zamaroni (University of California, Davis)

Team 7 - Olive

Alex Kelly (University of Idaho), Logan Real (California State University – Fresno), Kristofer Yelderman (Utah State University), Kolin Stock (Cal Poly State University - SLO), Karen Visscher (University of Alberta)

Team 8 - Orange

Summer Call (Cal Poly State University - SLO), Mariah Richards (Utah State University), Shai Searcy (Texas A&M University), Nathan Tollenaar (Cal Poly State University - SLO), Magnus Yoshimura (Washington State University)

2nd Place Teams:

Team 2 - Almond

Michael Campbell (Utah State University), Gerrit de Jong (Cal Poly State University), Courtnee Hainstock (University of Alberta), Regan Highsmith (Washington State University), Calissa Lubben (South Dakota State University), Mykaela Owens (University of Idaho)

Team 4 - Carrot

Jordan Bairos (California State University – Fresno), Kailey Foster (Utah State University), Trevor Maciel (Cal Poly State University - SLO), Logan Papinchak (Texas A&M University), Joseph Terry (University of California, Davis)

Team 12 - Lemon

Natalie Koke (Texas A&M University), Kylee Elmore (University of Idaho), Nicolaus Machado (California State University - Fresno), Danica Valencia (Cal Poly State University – SLO), Jenna Van Wyk (South Dakota State University)

A committee of dairy industry representatives organized the Dairy Challenge, led by local host volunteers. In addition, a long list of volunteers was important to the competition's success, as is the case for every Dairy Challenge event. To volunteer or become a sponsor for the 2021 contest, contact Molly Kelley at mollyk@dairychallenge.org or Renee Smith at rsmith@omegabalancer.com, or go to dairychallenge.org for more information. All contributions are tax deductible and contributing sponsor listings are available on the website.

The Western Regional Dairy Challenge is under the guidance and support of the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge (NAIDC), which was established in April 2002 as a collegiate management contest to incorporate evaluation of all aspects of a specific dairy business. For more information, visit www.dairychallenge.org. The four regional events lead to the national contest of a similar format, which will be held on March 26-28, 2020. The contest will be hosted by the Midwest Region, UW-Madison and Fox Valley Technical College in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

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Captions in the Info Section of each photo

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