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South Dakota State University, Iowa State University, and Dordt University Host the 24th Annual National Dairy Challenge Contest

Sioux Falls, SD., April 12-14, 2026—The 2026 National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy wrapped up on Tuesday, April 14th, 2026, after three days of immersive, hands-on learning experiences for 281 dairy-focused college students from across North America. Held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, this year's event set a new record for participation in both the academy and contest teams.

Students representing 43 colleges and universities participated in this unique event, which combines real-world farm evaluation with networking and professional development. Dairy Challenge is designed to help students from around the country bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application in the dairy industry.

“What keeps me involved year after year is the passion and desire to see these young students grow and mature into leaders in the dairy industry. These students are the future, and they are the rising stars. For them, Dairy Challenge is more than education. It is about networking and building relationships that will shape their future. For myself, it has given me the opportunity to see how other experienced industry leaders work day to day and to learn from people I would not normally run in the same circles with. Those exposures and connections are incredibly valuable to me, and they are a big part of why I am so passionate about being involved, so that future generations can have that same experience,” explained Jeffrey Elliott, Chair of the Dairy Challenge Board.

The event began on Sunday, April 12th, when students received herd data from their assigned farms. Contest and Academy participants then worked in teams to analyze the information, preparing for their on-site farm visits the following day.

On Monday, April 13th, 137 Academy students visited Boadwine Farms. Accompanied by industry mentors, students evaluated areas of the dairy farm such as calf care, parlor management, feed systems, and facility design. In the afternoon, students had the opportunity to interview the dairy producers to ask follow-up questions and gain a deeper understanding of on-farm goals and management practices. Using this insight, students then developed presentations and proposed strategies for improvement.

Meanwhile, 144 contest participants visited either Moody County Dairy or Tri-Cross Dairy. In just two hours, teams conducted a comprehensive farm analysis, followed by a Q&A session with the farm owners and advisors. Teams then prepared detailed recommendations in key areas such as nutrition, reproduction, milking procedures, animal health, cow comfort, and labor and financial management.



The final day of the contest saw judge panels evaluating each team's presentation, which highlighted the strengths and areas of improvement for their respective farms. Each panel of five judges included dairy producers, veterinarians, finance specialists and seasoned agribusiness personnel. Awards were presented to top-performing teams based on the quality of their analyses and practical recommendations.

Additionally, students visited the Career and Innovation Fair and attended top-level corporate technology seminars from NAIDC sponsors. These topics were presented by:

- Customer & Consultant of the Future. *Lauren Blauch, Dairy Innovation, Lead Advisor, Cargill Inc.*
- Advancements of Technology in Genetic and Reproductive Programs. *Ethan Haywood, Genetic Specialist, Select Sires Inc.*
- Macro Trends & Technology Shaping the Future of Dairy Farming. *Kyle Froslic, Agribusiness Lending Vice President, AgCountry Farm Credit Services*
- Precision Dairying: *Driving Performance Through Sensor Technology* and Genetic Innovation. *Brian Behnke, Genetic Program Specialist, ST Genetics*
- Keynote: Turning Insights into Action. *Kevin Coffey, Chief Executive Officer, VAS*

The event concluded at the annual banquet with the presentation of student awards, marking the end of the successful 2026 National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy. The judges awarded the following teams with the first and second place ranking on each farm among the 36 total contest teams participating and 25 total academy teams.

Dairy A, Tri-Cross Dairy

First Place: Purdue University Coached by Emma McLaughlin & Jacquelyne Boerman Front (L-R): Rachel Craun & Sydney Haag Back (L-R): Isaiah Eisert & Kent Hamstra





Second Place: Oklahoma State University Coached by Jason White Front (L-R): Clancey Krahn & Carmen Kuiper Back (L-R): Thomas Palla & Derek DeGroot



Dairy B, Tri-Cross Dairy

First Place: Texas A&M University Coached by Abby Van Adrichem & Michael Tomaszewski Front (L-R): Estrella Farias & Elizabeth Haugen Back (L-R): Dieter Ally & Rendyn Lamance



Second Place: The Pennsylvania State University Coached by Yoorae Kim, Sara Nichols, Leoni Martins & Chad Dechow Front (L-R): Jessica Fleisher & Hannah Mansfield Back (L-R): Jay Bratton & Rylan Curran



Dairy C. Moody County Dairy

First Place: University of Minnesota Coached by Marcia Endres Front (L-R): Alexis Hoefs & Brady Gille Back (L-R): Keenan Thygesen & Tyler Ratka



Second Place: University of Wisconsin - Madison Coached by Eric Ronk Front (L-R): Ava Dragosh & Clarissa Ulness Back (L-R): Jenna Gries & Derek Gehin

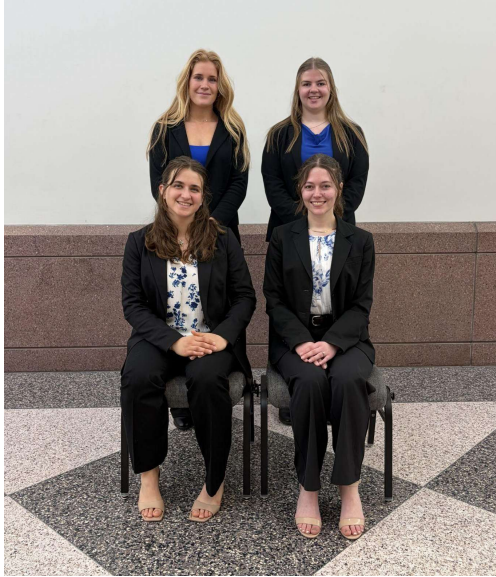


Dairy D, Moody County Dairy

First Place: Iowa State University Coached by Gail Carpenter Front (L-R): Jadyne Beland & Emily Zilisch Back (L-R): Anne Simpson & Tyler Machin



Second Place: University of Guelph Coached by Trevor DeVries Front (L-R): Zoe Jovkovic & Cadence Beck Back (L-R): Lynn Strick & Nicole Danen



Dairy E, Boadwine Farms: Groups 1-5

First Place: Group #5 Front (L-R): David Porsche (Delaware Valley University), Trevor Hath (University of Minnesota) Back (L-R): Faith Wolfe (Pennsylvania State University), Bianka Ronnebaum (Iowa State University), Gabriela Galvez (University of Vermont)



Dairy E, Boadwine Farms: Groups 6-10



First Place: Group #8 Front (L-R): Lindsie Fick (Dordt University), Alexis Parsons (University of Tennessee) Back (L-R): George Gioletti (Fresno State University), Jacob Harbaugh (University of Minnesota), Rylie Sexton (South Dakota State University)



Dairy E, Boadwine Farms: Groups 11-15

First Place: Group #11 Front (L-R): MacKenna Weaver (University of Vermont), Harlee Harbaugh (Southwest Wisconsin Technical College), Haley Ronnebaum (Iowa State University) Back (L-R): Garrett Ulness (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Courtney Williams (Alabama A&M University), Sean Anderson (McGill University)



Dairy E, Boadwine Farms: Groups 16-20



First Place: Group #18 Front (L-R): Kelly Niefergold (SUNY Morrisville), Rachel White (Cornell University) Back (L-R): Isabella Stoutenburg (Michigan State University), Petrie DuVall (Purdue University), Kaydan Shomaker (Virginia Tech)



Dairy E, Boadwine Farms: Groups 21-25

First Place: Group #22 Front (L-R): Madeline Geremia (Cornell University), Megan Klossner (SUNY Morrisville) Back (L-R): Anisa Scott (North Carolina A&T State University), Neil Venhuizen (Southwest Wisconsin Technical College), Kaylen Langhofer (West Texas A&M University)





The National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy is the concluding event of four regional contests sponsored each year by North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge® (NAIDC). The national contest and regional events - for about 250 dairy collegiates – are funded through generous support by 130 agribusinesses and dairy producers. Dairy Challenge has helped prepare over 10,000 students for careers as dairy owners or managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians or other dairy professionals.

About Dairy Challenge

NAIDC is an innovative event for students in dairy programs at North American post-secondary institutions. Its mission is to develop tomorrow's dairy leaders and enhance the progress of the dairy industry, by providing education, communication and networking among students, dairy producers, agribusiness and university personnel. The 2027 National Dairy Challenge contest will be held in Lansing, Michigan on March 31st-April 2nd, 2027; details are at www.dairychallenge.org.

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