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2nd Annual Southern Regional Dairy Challenge attracts 11 Schools to LSU Campus

On November 15-17, 2007, 48 students from 11 Southern colleges and universities participated in the second annual Southern Regional Dairy Challenge held at the Cook Hotel & Conference Center in Baton Rouge, La. Louisiana State University (LSU) staff and students hosted coaches and students from Berry College, University of Kentucky, Alabama A&M University, Louisiana State University, Virginia Tech, North Carolina State University (NCSU), Clemson University, Oklahoma State University, University of Florida, Southern University A&M, and Louisiana Tech University.

The Southern Regional Dairy Challenge is an innovative three-day event designed by a team of industry and university professionals to promote a vibrant future for the dairy industry. Working in mixed-university teams of five or six students, contestants assessed all aspects of a working dairy farm and presented recommendations for improvement to a panel of judges and participating farm families.

Participating dairy farmer Ladd Blades, Blades Dairy Farm of Kentwood, La., welcomed the opportunity to help teach students and get feedback from many sets of eyes that gave him new perspectives on his dairy farming practices.

The objective of this evaluation process is to create a real-life situation that stresses the importance of teamwork and professionalism. Contest Chairperson Gary Hay of Louisiana DHIA and Louisiana State University stated, "Dairy Challenge allows students to take the technical knowledge they have gained and apply it to real life. It's a great way to enhance students' team-building and communication skills, as well as their technical and observation skills."

Students arrived at the conference center on the afternoon of Nov. 15. After check-in and registration, participants were split into mixed-university teams. Teams got to know each other over jambalaya and then participated in team-building exercises with Dave Winston of Virginia Tech. 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," Winston commented.

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. After Friday evening's dinner at the Nelson Memorial Building, students relaxed by going to the LSU Block and Bridle Rodeo.

On the program's final day, each team presented their 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. While teams weren't presenting, they toured LSU's campus, which included a trip to the LSU Dairy Research Facility.

The Dairy Challenge ended with dinner and an awards ceremony. Paul Humes, director of the School of Animal Sciences, offered a greeting to the students. "I am truly impressed with the educational value of Dairy Challenge in developing teamwork, as well as improving the critical evaluation and decision-making skills that will serve you well in your careers."

After completing the event, NCSU student Katie Jackson said, "I had an amazing time and gained so much from the experience."

Team rankings were:

1st Place Platinum – Team 8, Cargill Inc: Amy Czaja, Oklahoma State University; Stephanie Graham, Berry College; Justin Hardin, North Carolina State University-Raleigh; Melanie Reed, Louisiana State University; Aaron Horst, Virginia Tech; and Phil Lawrence, University of Florida. **2nd Place Platinum – Team 7, Select Sires:** Edwin Noland, Louisiana State University; Stephanie Quarles, Clemson University; Mindy Kile, Louisiana Tech University; Jason Stuth, Virginia Tech; Catalina Echeverri, University of Florida; and Jamie Victorian, Southern University.

Gold (in random order) – **Team 6, Dairy Records Management Systems:** Matricia Horton, Alabama A&M University; Jacob Pieper, Virginia Tech; Kyle Johnson, University of Florida; Ryan Sloop, North Carolina State University-Raleigh; and Maggie Boykin, Louisiana Tech University. **Team 1, Genex CRI:** Curtis Coombs, University of Kentucky; Amanda Wright, Oklahoma State University; Karryne Humphry, Southern University; Brandi Roebuck, Alabama A&M University; Ben Clark, Louisiana State University; and Katie Jackson, North Carolina State University-Raleigh. **Team 3, Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers:** Valerie Eubanks, Clemson University; Felton Deroun, Southern University; Patrick Dooley, Alabama A&M University; Matt Fry, Virginia Tech; and Eric Morissett, Oklahoma State University. **Team 2, Dairy Farmers of America:** Jacqueline Cheatwood, Oklahoma State University; Dakota Sparks, North Carolina State University-Raleigh; Ryan Doescher, Louisiana State University; Diane Tearney, University of Florida; and Alyson Offenheiser, University of Kentucky.

Silver (in random order) – **Team 9, Dairy Production Systems/New Frontier Bank:** Sonja Galley, Virginia Tech; Leslie Gentry, North Carolina State University-Raleigh; Bethany Brewer, Louisiana State University; Will Cone, University of Florida; and Virgil Womack, Southern University. **Team 4, DHI-Provo:** J.T. Price, Clemson University; Sarah-Baker Walker, Berry College; Detrick Black, Alabama A&M University; Heather Weeks, Virginia Tech; and Katy Bridges, Louisiana State University. **Team 5, ABS Global:** Elizabeth Holloway, Louisiana Tech University; Kayla Jackson, Berry College; Karl Wesley Henry, Alabama A&M University; Madeline Milford, Clemson University; and Nellie Benton, Southern University.

North Carolina State University will host the 2008 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge. Next year's goal is to include two host farms, which will allow for participation of more colleges and universities, and perhaps as many as 80 to 90 students. If you have questions about next year's contest, contact Steve Washburn at Steve_Washburn@ncsu.edu. To become a sponsor, contact Gary Hay at ghay@agcenter.lsu.edu. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Contributing sponsor listings are available on the Dairy Challenge web site.

The Southern Regional Dairy Challenge is under the guidance and support of the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge, which was established in April 2002 as a management contest to incorporate evaluation of all aspects of a specific dairy business. For more information, visit www.dairychallenge.org

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