



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Molly Kelley

Executive Director

[mollyk@dairychallenge.org](mailto:mollyk@dairychallenge.org)

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### **NAIDC Elects New Leadership for 2025-2026**

North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge® (NAIDC) recently elected new leadership, including four new board members and the 2025 – 2026 Executive Committee. As stated in the NAIDC mission statement, the organization strives to “Develop tomorrow’s dairy leaders and enhance the progress of the dairy industry, by providing education, communication and networking among students, producers, and agribusiness and university personnel.”

In its 23-year history, Dairy Challenge has evolved significantly to meet the ever-changing needs of the dairy industry. The Program originally began in 2002 with 56 students from 13 colleges competing in one national event. Today there are more than 500 dairy students participating annually throughout the national competition, Dairy challenge Academy and four regional events. The volunteer Board of Directors represents the many university professionals, dairy producers, and industry sponsors who contribute to these opportunities.

Newly elected to the 15-person volunteer NAIDC Board of Directors include:

- **Lauren Mayo, North Carolina A&T State University, NC.** - Dr. Mayo is an Assistant Professor of Reproductive Physiology at North Carolina A&T State University. She has over a decade of experience in student coaching, dairy industry engagement, and agriculture education. She holds a B.S in Animal Science with a minor in Agriculture Communications for the University of Florida, an M.S. in Animal & Food Sciences for the University of Kentucky, an additional M.S. in Animal Sciences from the University of Missouri, and a Ph.D. in Integrative Biosciences at Tuskegee University. She remains deeply involved in dairy educational outreach, coaching students in farm evaluation, business analysis, and records-based decision-making. Many of her students have competed in regional and national Dairy Challenge contests. In her professional career she also leads research in cattle precision technologies, early pregnancy detection and reproductive management, while also taking on an education role by teaching a variety of dairy and animal science courses.

- **Linda Parreira, AgWest Farm Credit, CA.** – Linda has served as a Relationship Manager with AgWest Farm Credit for the past 10 years, managing a portfolio of dairy operations across three counties. She enjoys working collaboratively with producers through good and challenging times. Since 2018, She has been an active Dairy Challenge Volunteer, serving as a finance mentor and contest judge at both regional and national levels. Linda grew up on her family’s dairy farm caring for calves and earned a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Business with a minor in Dairy Science through Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

• **Doug DeGroff, Progressive Dairy Solutions, CA.** – Doug works for Progressive Dairy Solutions. He is also a Cornell University Animal Science graduate with about three decades of experience working in the Dairy Industry. He began his career with Monsanto dairy, later managing a large Wisconsin dairy before returning to the west as a nutritionist for Cargill Animal Nutrition. In 2007, Doug founded Diversified Dairy Solutions, LLC, a dairy nutrition and management consulting firm he successfully operated for 17 years. In 2024 he joined Progressive Dairy Solutions, bringing extensive expertise in dairy nutrition and herd management. In his personal life he and his wife, Alison, live in Tulare, California where they raise their three children on an almond and pistachio farm. He remains active in his community, volunteering with his church, local schools, and his children's FFA chapter.

• **Elizabeth Eckelkamp, University of Tennessee, TN.** – Dr. Eckelkamp is an Assistant Professor of Animal Science and an Extension Specialist for the University of Tennessee. She earned her Ph.D. in Dairy Husbandry and Production from the University of Kentucky Lexington in 2017. Her work focuses on dairy system management, precision dairy technologies, and cow health. She provides research-based tools and education to improve farm efficiency, collaborating with extension agents and producers. Elizabeth also conducts applied research focusing on consumer preferences for local products, value-added dairy production, and strategies to support the success of Tennessee dairy producers. She coordinates the Tennessee Master Dairy Producer Program, offering certification and training for dairy professionals.

**The NAIDC Executive Committee for 2024-25 includes:**

- Chair: Jeffrey Elliott, Balchem, Amarillo, TX.
- Vice Chair: Ted Halbach, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI.
- Associate Vice Chair: Gail Carpenter, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.
- Finance Chair: Megan Mouw, Elanco Animal Health, Fresno, CA.
- Promotions and Engagement Chair: Erin Spangler, Riverview, LLP, Morris, MN.
- Program Committee Chair: Trevor DeVries, University of Guelph, Guelph, CAN.

***About Dairy Challenge***

NAIDC is an innovative educational 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, producers, and agribusiness and university personnel. Over its 23-year history, Dairy Challenge has helped prepare more than 9,000 students for careers as farm owners and managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians or other dairy professionals. In addition to the national competition and Dairy Challenge Academy held each spring, four regional contests take place in late fall and winter. Learn more at [www.dairychallenge.org](http://www.dairychallenge.org).

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PHOTO CAPTIONS:



Lauren Mayo, North Carolina A&T State University, NC



Linda Parreira, AgWest Farm Credit, CA



Doug DeGroff, Progressive Dairy Solutions, CA



Elizabeth Eckelkamp, University of Tennessee, TN