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Midwest Dairy Challenge draws 102 students to Indiana

The Fourth Annual Midwest Dairy Challenge, which ran Jan. 31-Feb. 2, attracted 102 students from 13 universities and colleges to the heart of a blizzard in Merrillville, Ind. The inclement weather forced the group to forge new territory for the Dairy Challenge, as buses were unable to transport students to the contest farms for tours. Instead, virtual tours were available for the students to analyze the operations.

"This year we not only challenged students to use their education to evaluate a dairy farm, we asked them to be flexible and creative in a real-world situation where the weather got the better of us," said Contest Chair Kylie Daniels from ADM Alliance Nutrition Inc. "Their maturity shined through as they worked hard with their teams to analyze the farms with the information available."

Dairy Challenge is an innovative competition developed by industry and university professionals that exposes students to opportunities in a vibrant dairy industry. Working in four- or five-person, mixed-university teams, students assessed all aspects of a working dairy farm and presented recommendations for improvement to a panel of judges and the participating farm families.

This year's contest was held at the the Radisson Hotel in Merrillville, Ind., and hosted by Purdue University, as well as North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge (NAIDC) board member Linda Hodorff of Second Look Holsteins LLC, Eden, Wis. It included students from Michigan State University, North Dakota State University, Ohio State University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Lakeshore Technical College, University of Illinois, Iowa State University, South Dakota State University, University of Minnesota, Kansas State University, Purdue University, University of Wisconsin-River Falls and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College.

After they arrived, students joined their new teammates and had the opportunity to experience the Fair

Oaks Dairy Adventure in Fair Oaks, Ind.

The next day, students were led in virtual farm tours of three dairies located in the Merrillville area by Midwest Dairy Challenge Committee members. Sunny Ridge Dairy is a 730-cow dairy owned and operated by the Doug and Margaret Leman family of Francesville, Ind. The primary management team is comprised of family members, with two generations actively involved in all aspects of the operation. The facilities are designed to accommodate future expansion to 1,600 milking cows.

In Union Mills, Ind., is the farm of Yon and Alice Lindborg, located on land that has been in the Lindborg family since the 1920s. After Yon and Alice both received their doctor of veterinary medicine degrees from Purdue University, they decided to return to the dairy operation. The farm consists of 250 cows, of which all are 100% registered, and 1,400 acres of cropland.

The third dairy evaluated is owned and operated by David and Nancy Kleine of Cedar Lake, Ind. Kleines are currently milking 80 cows with future plans of expanding to 120 cows. The entire herd has been AI bred since 1960 and about half are registered.

After the virtual tours, students had time to meet with their teams and develop questions for the herd owners. The herd owners were then put in touch with the students either in person or via teleconference. They then entertained questions from both students and judges about their farming operations. Armed with detailed production and financial paperwork from the farms, as well as their own observations, the participants developed a presentation about what they saw and suggestions for improvement. Saturday was presentation day as the teams were given 20 minutes to offer their suggestions. This was followed by a question-and-answer session and a critique by the judges regarding their presentation and recommendations. Susan Orth, Waupun, Wis., from the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin, offered leadership training sessions during the day.

Throughout the weekend, participants had several opportunities to network with industry professionals who attended the event. Representatives from many of the platinum sponsors, including several who were looking to hire both interns and full-time employees, were also available for a career fair that was held on Feb. 2.

Judges chose six teams as platinum winners, the contest's highest distinction. The individuals who comprised these teams are: Ohio State – Renee Starkey, Stephanie Metzger, Anton Henry and Eric Weitzel; Michigan State – Katelyn Thompson, Kayla Kreh, Andre Bruinsma and Mike Hattis; University of Illinois – Clinton Harre, Elizabeth Johnson and Erin Lyons; University of Wisconsin-River Falls – Eric Haupt; University of Minnesota – Micki Czech, Brenda Nelson and Evan Van Beusekom; Iowa State – Tim Rauen; Purdue University – Steve Hein and Craig Blough; South Dakota State – Rachel Patrick and Tim Korver; University of Wisconsin-Madison – Evan Schnadt and Kelsi Hendrickson; Kansas State – Michelle Sullivan and Kristen Schulte; Lakeshore Technical College – Josh Phillips; and North Dakota State – Christine Drake, Cole Rupprecht, Kendra Hinnenkamp and Karissa Brobst.

The North American Dairy Challenge was established as a management contest to incorporate all phases of a specific dairy business. It strives to incorporate a higher-learning atmosphere with practical application to help prepare students for dairy industry careers. Supported financially through generous donations by industry and coordinated by a volunteer board of directors, the first NAIDC was held in

April 2002.

For more information on the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge, call 217-485-3441, e-mail naidcmjk@aol.com, or visit www.dairychallenge.org.

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Note to Editors: Photo of Platinum winners available upon request to info@usjersey.com (*today only*) or jstaudinger@charterinternet.com