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Students Attend Annual Northeast Regional Dairy Challenge

Nearly 110 students from 10 northeast colleges and two Canadian universities participated in the sixth annual Northeast Regional Dairy Challenge held October 30 and November 1, 2008 at the Four Points Sheraton in Harrisburg, Pa. Dr. Lisa Holden and colleagues from The Pennsylvania State University welcomed students from Alfred State College, Cornell University, Delaware Valley College, Morrisville State College, The Pennsylvania State University, SUNY Cobleskill, University of Maine, University of New Hampshire, University of Vermont, Vermont Technical College, University of Guelph from Ontario, Canada, and McGill University from Quebec, Canada.

The Northeast Regional Dairy Challenge is an innovative multi-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 four or five students, contestants assessed all aspects of a working dairy farm and presented recommendations for improvement to a panel of judges and participating farm families.

The objective of this evaluation process is to create a real-life situation that stresses the importance of teamwork and professionalism. Contest chair Dan Finnerty of Cargill reported, "Our business requires employees that can work well with all types of personalities. Not only does the Dairy Challenge teach technical knowledge, it excels in assisting students in developing people skills."

Students arrived in Harrisburg, Pa. on the afternoon of October 30. After check-in and registration, participants were split into teams named after sponsoring organizations. Teams had the opportunity to get to know each other over pizza, hear remarks from Dennis C Wolff, Pennsylvania's Secretary of Agriculture, and then participate in teambuilding exercises with Jim Henion of Genex. Henion worked with students to discover the strengths and capabilities of their team, examine ingredients of effective teams, appoint a team leader, and examine personality styles of team members. At the end of the evening, teams received detailed production, financial, nutrition, and reproduction records, and began brainstorming for their farm visit.

The next morning, teams traveled to one of three host farms to evaluate cows, facilities, and management practices. Host farms were Brubaker Farms in Mount Joy, Pa., Meadow-Vista Farms in Bainbridge, Pa., and Yippee! Farms in Mount Joy, Pa. 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. On Friday evening, students enjoyed a dinner off-site and games and other activities at the nearby Friendship Community Center.

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 their evaluations matched the judges' evaluations of the dairy operation. All teams also participated in educational workshops at the farm of Lynn and Sara Royer in Elizabethtown, Pa. and attended an industry fair.

The Dairy Challenge ended with dinner and an awards ceremony. Judges for the event congratulated participants on their outstanding job and shared their recommendations for each farm.

Dairy Challenge teams are named after businesses that sponsor the event. Team rankings were: *Silver* – Cargill, Inc., Chris Hansen, Cows Come First, DHI Provo, Diamond V, Genex Cooperative, Holtz-Nelson Dairy Consultants, Northeast Ag and Feed Alliance, Pa. Center for Dairy Excellence, Prince AgriProducts, and Schering-Plough Animal Health; *Gold* – Agway Foundation, Alltech, Farm Credit System Foundation, Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative, Northeast Dairy Producers' Association, Northeast Farm Credit Ag Enhancement, and Select Sire Power; and *Platinum* – AgChoice Farm Credit, Dairy One, and Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association; *Don Rogers Platinum* – Adisseo and Blue Seal Richer Feeds. Don Rogers Awards are given to the "best of the best," symbolizing Don's commitment to the Dairy Challenge and Dairy Industry.

The State University of New York at Cobleskill will host the 2009 Northeast Regional Dairy Challenge on November 5–7, 2009. For more information, contact Cobleskill's Dayton Maxwell at maxweldt@cobleskill.edu or Jenny Mills of Elanco Animal Health at MILLS_JENNY_K@LILLY.COM. To become a sponsor, please contact Jan Bitter of First Pioneer Farm Credit at 800-392-3276 or jan.bitter@firstpioneer.com. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Contributing sponsor listings are available on the web site.

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 careers in the dairy industry. Supported financially through generous donations by industry and coordinated by a volunteer board of directors, the first NAIDC was held in April 2002. In 2009, NAIDC will be held March 29-30, in Syracuse, N.Y. For more information about NAIDC, log on to the new version of its web site at www.dairychallenge.org.

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Note to Editors: Photo available by contacting WDE Management Inc., 3310 Latham Drive, Madison, WI 53713, phone: 608-224-0400, ext. 108, fax: 608-224-0300, or e-mail: lbehne@wdexpo.com.