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Dairy Challenge® Hosts 19th Annual National Contest

MADISON, WI, April 23, 2021 – This past year has deeply changed us — all at once, things were no longer as they once were. Dairy Challenge took a widely different path. No longer were students traveling to different areas and exploring the farms with their boots on the ground. The National Dairy Challenge transformed and forged ahead.

College dairy students – 190 in total – from 30 colleges gathered virtually for the 19th annual Dairy Challenge. Dairy students worked to improve their dairy management and communication skills, networked with other students, and explored industry careers.

Dairy Challenge is a unique, real-world experience where dairy students work as a team and apply their college coursework to evaluate and provide solutions for an operating dairy farm.

This year's contest included 24 universities, whose four-person teams competed for awards based on their quality of teams' farm analysis and appropriate solutions. Their farm presentations were evaluated by a panel of judges, including dairy producers, veterinarians, finance specialists and seasoned agribusiness personnel.

The Academy provided interactive training for 102 ~~nearly 90~~ students from four-year universities or two-year dairy programs. Academy participants were divided into smaller groups including dairy industry volunteers who worked as advisors to coach these less-experienced academy participants as they assessed the dairy and developed recommendations.

Dairy Challenge Applies Learning to a Real-world Dairy

Over its 20-year history, Dairy Challenge has helped more than 7,000 students prepare for careers in the dairy industry, dairy production and veterinary medicine.

“Dairy Challenge is an opportunity for college students from across North America to engage with industry professionals to learn about contemporary dairy issues. Analysis of the dairy operation utilizing data such as financial statements, dairy health and reproduction records, feed information, farm maps, and farm manager interviews are all used to pull together recommendations for the produce,” said Wanda Emerich NAIDC board chair. “Our hope is that students build their network with other students in addition to finding jobs with our many sponsors. We want the students to walk away with new knowledge gained they will take out into the world after college.”

The virtual event began with learning webinars where industry representatives helped students better understand dairy conditions and shared details about reproduction, cow comfort, data management, nutrition, transition diseases, and calf raising.

The contest and academy participants received in-depth management data from a Wisconsin dairy. The next day, all students virtually visited the dairy to witness dairy operations. After a question-answer session with the farm owners, the student teams developed recommendations for nutrition, reproduction, milking procedures, animal health, cow comfort, and labor and financial management. The last day students presented their recommendations to the judging panel, visited with sponsors at the career fair, and attended an educational seminar presented by Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin.

Ten College Teams Earn Top Awards

At Friday evening's awards ceremony, the following contest teams and students were announced as First Place winners:

- **University of Idaho:** Sadie Hurley, Taythen Larson, Nicole Poxleitner, Taylor Stephenson and Amin Ahmadzadeh (coach)
- **Michigan State University:** Kristen Burkhardt, Miriah Dershem, Beka McDonald, Lynn Olthof and Roger Thomson (coach)
- **California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo:** Jacob Nicholas de Jong, Brandon Lemstra, Brian Martin, Derrick Nunes, David Vagnoni (coach), Julie Huzzey (coach) and Rich Silacci (coach)
- **The Ohio State University:** Paul Bensman, Caleb Rykaczewski, Brietta Latham, Sarah Lehner, Maurice Eastridge (coach) and Benjamin Wenner (coach)
- **University of Guelph:** Rebecca Barr, Brooke Boonstoppel, Clayton McWilliams, Tyrone Wagler and Trevor DeVries (coach)

Teams and students earning Second Place include:

- **University of Wisconsin-Madison:** Emma Gwidt, Caleb LaCount, Jessica Mehre, Dawson Nickels and Ted Halbach (coach)
- **The Pennsylvania State University:** Shara Allman, George DeMers, Kelly Forbes, Sydney Jewell, Lisa Holden (coach) and Virginia Ishler (coach)
- **Virginia Tech:** Todd Allen, Isabelle Leonard, John McGehee, Christine Putman and Alex White (coach)
- **Aggregate Team #18:** Katarina Emerich, Purdue University; Raina O'Leary, University of Idaho; Morgan Smith, University of Idaho; Louise Terwilliger Parmelee, University of Vermont; coached by Jacquelyn Boerman, Elizabeth Karcher, Wanda Emerich and Amin Ahmadzadeh
- **Texas A&M University:** Christopher Childress, Lyndsey Heywood, Paige Howard, Natalie Koke, Sushil Paudyal (coach) and Jennifer Spencer (coach)

About Dairy Challenge

The North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge 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 progress of the dairy industry, by providing education, communication and networking among students, producers, and agribusiness and university personnel. Over its 20-year national history, Dairy Challenge has helped prepare more than 7,000 students for careers as farm owners and managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians or other dairy professionals. The next national event will be hosted in Green Bay, Wisconsin, March 31- April 2, 2022. Four regional events are held in late fall and winter; details are at www.dairychallenge.org.