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University of Florida Hosts the 23rd Annual National Dairy Challenge Contest

GAINESVILLE, FL., April 6-8, 2025—The 2025 National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy wrapped up on Tuesday, April 8th, 2025 after three days of immersive, hands-on learning experiences for 241 dairy-focused college students from across North America. Held in Gainesville, Florida, this year's event marked the first time many students had the opportunity to visit a southern dairy farm.

Students representing 35 colleges and universities participated in this unique event, which combines real-world farm evaluation with networking and professional development. Dairy Challenge is designed to help students bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application in the dairy industry.

“So many students share that Dairy challenge was truly life-changing with me. They explained it exposed them to new experiences, shifted their perspective on careers, and gave them a chance to practice real-world consulting. It is such a blessing to have a contest that lets students try something hard, grow from it, and walk away proud of what they accomplished,” explained Dr. Jackie Boerman, coach of the Purdue University team.

The event began on Sunday, April 6th, when students received herd data from their assigned farms. Contest and Academy participants then worked in teams to analyze the information, preparing for their on-site farm visits the following day.

On Monday, April 7th, 114 Academy students visited either the Alliance Branford dairy or the University of Florida's dairy farm. Accompanied by industry mentors, students evaluated areas of the dairy farm such as calf care, parlor management, feed systems, and transition cow protocols. In the afternoon, students had the opportunity to interview the dairy producers to gain a deeper understanding of on-farm goals and management practices. Using this insight, students then developed presentations and proposed strategies for improvement.

Meanwhile, 127 contest participants visited either Southern Cross Dairy or North Florida Dairies. In just two hours, teams conducted a comprehensive farm analysis, followed by a Q&A session with the farm owners and advisors. Teams then prepared detailed recommendations in key areas such as nutrition, reproduction, milking procedures, animal health, cow comfort, and labor and financial management.

The final day of the contest saw judge panels evaluating each team's presentation, which highlighted the strengths and areas of improvement for their respective farms. Each panel of five judges included dairy producers, veterinarians, finance specialists and seasoned agribusiness personnel. Awards were presented to top-performing teams based on the quality of their analyses and practical recommendations.



Additionally, students visited the Career and Innovation Fair and attended top-level corporate technology seminars from NAIDC sponsors. These topics were presented by:

- Tara Bonhert of CowManager (presented by Select Sires) - “Data Driven Decision Making: It’s a Team Sport”
- Dr. Christian Rippe of ST Genetics - “Global Advancements in Dairy Production through Innovation in Reproduction and Genomics.”
- Kristen Chapman of Cargill - “Driving Innovation: The Role of Young Professionals”
- Paula Molinari of GENEX - “Mooving to the Future”
- Heather Weeks of Farm Credit East - “Bring out your Best with Benchmarking”
- Don Bennink of North Florida Dairies - “The Importance of Being Progressive”

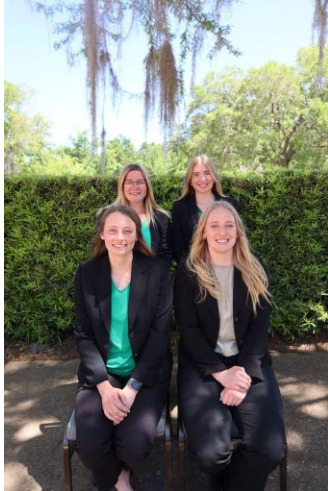
The event concluded at the annual banquet with the presentation of student awards, marking the end of the successful 2025 National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy. The judges awarded the following teams with the first and second place ranking on each farm among the 32 total teams participating.

Dairy A, Southern Cross

First Place: University of Guelph Coached by Trevor DeVries (Back L-R) Tim Hoogendoorn, Emmeline te Bokkel, (Front L-R) Gillian Forestell, Lauren Hoonard



Second Place: Michigan State University Coached by Roger Thomson (Back L-R) Brianna Armbruster, Jaylin Dilsaver, (Front L-R) Elizabeth Hyman, Clea Moore



Dairy B, Southern Cross

First Place: Aggregate Team (Back L-R) Maryann Gudenkauf - University of Wisconsin - Madison, Louis Hamlett - Iowa State University, (Front L-R) Taylor Lawhorn - The Ohio State University, Li Chen - Kansas State University



Second Place: California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo Coached by David Vagnoni (Back L-R) Jason Machado, Grady Taylor, (Front L-R) Alicia Perez, Giana Hollingsworth



Dairy C, North Florida Dairies

First Place: University of Wisconsin - Madison Coached by Eric Ronk (Back L-R) Kylie Konyn, Isaiah Hoffman, (Front L-R) Brooke Meinholz, Emma Mathison



Second Place: Texas Tech University Coached by Ellen Schilderink (Back L-R) Jett Ramaekers, Tim Ally, (Front L-R) Iris Schilderink, Megan van Adrichem

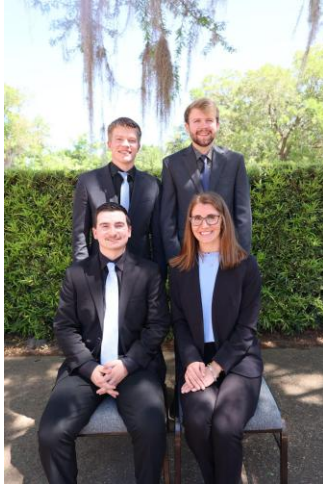


Dairy D, North Florida Dairies

First Place: Aggregate Team (Back L-R) Isaac Haar - SUNY Morrisville, Emily Mayo - Cornell University, (Front L-R) Tiyantha Anthony - North Carolina A&T University, Emma Vos - University of Wisconsin - Madison



Second Place: University of Minnesota Coached by Marcia Endres (Back L-R) Caden Carlson, Seth Heitman, (Front L-R) Blake Zimmer, Megan Ratka



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The National Dairy Challenge Contest and Academy is the concluding event of four regional contests sponsored each year by North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge® (NAIDC). The national contest and regional events - for about 250 dairy collegiates – are funded through generous support by 130 agribusinesses and dairy producers. Dairy Challenge has helped prepare over 10,000 students for careers as dairy owners or managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians or other dairy professionals.

About Dairy Challenge

NAIDC 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 the progress of the dairy industry, by providing education, communication and networking among students, dairy producers, agribusiness and university personnel. The 2026 National Dairy Challenge contest will be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on April 12-14, 2026; details are at www.dairychallenge.org.

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