

University of Tennessee and Middle Tennessee State University Host Southern Regional Dairy Challenge®

The Holiday Inn in Knoxville, Tennessee was home base for the 2025 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge held November 16 to 18. The event was hosted by University of Tennessee and Middle Tennessee State University. Seventy-six dairy students from 14 colleges 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. The events were coordinated by the southern regional planning committee.

Teams were compiled from different universities into five and six member teams. Teams competed for awards based on their quality of farm analysis and appropriate solutions. Their farm presentations were evaluated by a panel of four judges, including dairy producers, veterinarians, finance specialists and seasoned agribusiness personnel.

Dairy Challenge Applies Learning to a Real-World Dairy

The three-day event began with learning stations at University of Tennessee, where the farm team and industry representatives helped students better understand Tennessee dairy conditions and shared details about reproduction, cow comfort, robotic milking parlors and nutrition. Back at the Holiday Inn, students participated in educational seminars and enjoyed dinner.

Day One concluded with the contest participants receiving in-depth management data from the contest dairy, Davis Bros Dairy. The next day, all students had a short time – only two hours – to visit the contest dairy and 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.

On Day Three, students presented their recommendations to two groups of judging panels, visited with sponsors at the Career Fair, and learned through educational sessions that included a career panel. As the third day ended, the following teams were announced as first place winners.

Panel A: Team 7 – Team members included Kristina Duncan (University of Florida), George Wilson (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Rachel Thomason (University of Mount Olive), Whitley Robey (Virginia Tech), Ashley Knox (West Virginia University), and Alondra Leon Santes (Middle Tennessee State University)

Panel B: Team 10 – Team members included Claire Betley (Iowa State University), James Baer (West Virginia University), Mackenzie Crawford (Virginia Tech), Hannah Schmidt (University of Mount Olive), Alyssa Dunn (North Carolina A&T State University), and Ellen Black (University of Tennessee)

Total Industry Effort

The host farms opened their farms for analysis and in exchange, received a wealth of ideas from students and judges. The farm for the 2025 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge was:

- **Davis Bros Dairy** Philadelphia, Tennessee

This event would not have been possible without the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Middle Tennessee State University, and Jeff Elliot, Southern Region Dairy Challenge Chair, the southern regional planning committee, and all the gracious sponsors, mentors and volunteers.

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, agribusiness and university personnel. Over its 24-year national history, Dairy Challenge has helped prepare more than 10,000 students for careers as farm owners and managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians, or other dairy professionals. The next national event will be hosted in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, April 12-14, 2026. Four regional events are held in late fall and winter; details are at www.dairychallenge.org.