



2026 North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge & Academy

Sunday April 12 – Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Hosted by South Dakota State University, Iowa State University, Dordt University
and the Midwest Regional Dairy Challenge Planning Committee

Denny Sanford Premier Center/Sheraton Sioux Falls in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

<https://www.dairychallenge.org/contests/national-contest-and-academy/>

To Register: <https://2026NAIDCCContestandAcademy.eventbrite.com>

Deadline for entry: February 12, 2026

January 13, 2026

Dear Coaches,

On behalf of the National Program Committee of the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge, it is our privilege to invite your university to participate in the 24th Annual Dairy Challenge and the 13th Annual Dairy Challenge Academy. These events will be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota April 12-14, 2026.

The **North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge Contest (Dairy Challenge)** is a two and a half-day competition that enables four-person teams to evaluate a well-managed dairy farm business and then recommend management enhancements to a panel of judges comprised of industry and academic professionals.

The **Dairy Challenge Academy** will run in conjunction with the National Contest. The Academy gives students an intensive training program using the educational component of the Dairy Challenge contest. Graduate students are eligible to participate as well, noting priority will be given to undergraduate students.

See attached Eligibility Requirements for more details on both the National Contest and Academy.

A student may only participate/compete in a total of two (2) Dairy Challenge Academies and one (1) National Dairy Challenge Contest.

Registration

The Entry Form (single form for Contest and Academy) link is online at
<https://www.dairychallenge.org/contests/national-contest-and-academy/> and Eventbrite at
<https://2026NAIDCCContestandAcademy.eventbrite.com>

- **Deadline for entry: February 12, 2026.** Completed entries will receive priority by date, time of receipt, and previous participation in the regional and national programs. A confirmation letter with more details including housing information and student information form link will be sent upon receipt of your registration material and after February 12.
- **Entry Fee:** \$100 per student. Entry fees are nonrefundable after February 12.
- Each student is responsible for completing an online Student Information Form. Students must submit this form by March 10, 2026. This form will be available on the Dairy Challenge website after February 12 at <https://www.dairychallenge.org/contests/national-contest-and-academy/>

Resources for Student Preparation

A variety of training resources are posted on our website at www.dairychallenge.org/student_resources/. Coaches are also encouraged to review past contest materials posted at www.dairychallenge.org/member-access/index.php using the login password "coach."

Coaches Webinar

A webinar to review plans for the 2026 Contest and Academy will be offered on **Thursday, January 15 at 2:00 PM Eastern, 1:00 PM Central, 12:00 PM Mountain, 11:00 AM Pacific**. All coaches are invited; new coaches are especially encouraged to attend. The meeting will be recorded and posted to the National Contest & Academy page for later viewing. There will be time for coaches to ask questions.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8608448448?pwd=NjFrd2pJTmg2NW5HdjVvRUNUMVFBdz09&omn=81539307853>

Meeting ID: 860 844 8448

Passcode: 980248

Travel Support Available for Schools

A pool of sponsor funds has been set aside to support National Contest travel costs for schools in need. Schools seeking assistance must complete an application and submit it by February 1, 2026. Support is limited to schools participating in the Contest.

Social Media Corps Accepting Applications

We are currently accepting applications for social media corps to support the national contest & Academy. If you have a student with an interest in PR or communications who is not a contest or academy participant, please encourage them to apply. Go to <https://www.dairychallenge.org/library/news/25-26-Dairy-Challenge-Social-Media-Application-Rev-250826.pdf> Applications are due February 13, 2026.

If you have any questions about the event, please don't hesitate to contact us. We look forward to your participation in this exciting and innovative contest.

Sincerely,

Trevor DeVries
Program Committee Chair

Molly Kelley
Executive Director

Attachments:

2026 NAIDC Travel Information
2026 National Dairy Challenge Contest & Academy Eligibility Requirements
2026 NAIDC Tips for Registration
2026 NAIDC Contest Travel Stipend Application



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Travel Information

Headquarter Hotel for all participants (Students, coaches and volunteers)

Sheraton Sioux Falls Hotel & Convention Center

1211 North West Avenue

Sioux Falls, SD 57104

University Rate: \$144.00+tax

Arrival: Sunday, April 12, 2026

Departure: Tuesday, April 14, 2026 or Wednesday, April 15, 2026

The Sheraton is attached to the Denny Sanford Premier Center.

Complete information on housing including the housing reservation form will be sent with your entry confirmation in February. This will also be posted on our national contest webpage. Please note, unlike regional events, **for this event it will be your responsibility to submit housing reservations for you and your student participants using the NAIDC Housing Reservation Form.** Student rooms are paid for by the contest, while coaches' rooms are the school's responsibility. Housing forms will be sent to you with your confirmation in February and are due March 10, 2026.

Schedule

Schools should plan to be onsite in Sioux Falls on Sunday, April 12. Onsite registration will be open 4:45 - 5:15 p.m. at the Denny Sanford Premier Center (attached to the Sheraton). Dinner will be served at 5:30 PM, immediately followed by contest overview and data distribution for contest and Academy participants. Schools should plan to depart either after the banquet on Tuesday, April 14 or on Wednesday, April 15.

Airport Information for Sioux Falls, SD

[Sioux Falls Regional Airport](#)

4.0 Miles

Sheraton offers complimentary airport shuttle

Meals

- Meals will be provided for one Contest coach and/or one Academy coach, each Academy participant and Contest team member as follows: Dinner Sunday, April 12; breakfast, lunch and dinner on both Monday April 13 and Tuesday April 14.
- Those with dietary restrictions should note such when completing their entry form so catering staff can be alerted.
- Teams bringing more than one Contest coach and/or more than one Academy coach are asked to pay the full price for the additional meals (\$170) when completing the entry form.

Travel Support Available for Contest Participating Schools

A pool of sponsor funds has been set aside to support National Contest travel costs for schools in need. Schools

must apply for assistance. The stipend amount awarded to each school will depend on the number of applications approved. Application requirements: Schools must have a team competing in the national contest and must travel (drive or fly) at least 800 miles to be considered for the stipend. **Deadline to submit this form: February 1, 2026.** Schools receiving travel assistance will be notified prior to the March 10 registration deadline to assist with travel plans. Interested schools should complete the form (attached to email), also available on the [2026 National Contest](#) webpage.

Optional Sunday Pre-Contest Activities for Early Arriving Schools

The local committee is assembling a list of suggested activities for schools who choose to arrive early. Early arriving schools are responsible for all arrangements and expenses including transportation, meals and lodging prior to checking into the Sheraton on Sunday, April 12, 2026. There is a small block of rooms available at the Sheraton at the \$144 rate for schools interested in staying at the Sheraton Saturday night.



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National Dairy Challenge Contest & Academy Eligibility Requirements

Contest Participation

- The national contest is limited to the first 32 school teams who register, with the possibility of accepting up to 36 teams. Teams are limited to 4 students who have not previously participated in the National Contest. Completed entries will receive priority by date, time of receipt, and previous participation in the regional and national programs.
- If the 32-team limit is not met, aggregate teams will be formed.
- If a university does not have enough students to create a team of 4, the coach has two options for registration:
 - *Identify another school who cannot field a full team, and merge together with that school to register a complete team of 4.*
 - *Register an incomplete team, and request NAIDC management merge teams and/or complete those teams with extra contestants from schools who are already registering a full team.*
- If a university has a team of 4 and has additional student(s) interested in competing, the coach should complete an entry for the additional student(s) interested in being placed on aggregate team(s).

In the event aggregate students are not placed on a team, these students may request to transfer their registration to the Academy by indicating so on their aggregate registration. *Because of the uncertainty of their participation status, the entry fee is noted as "FREE". Payment should be made once participation is confirmed.*

Contest Eligibility

- Each contestant in the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge National Contest must be a student in a North American educational institution that offers a bachelor's degree in agriculture with classes that have emphasis in dairy production during the academic year of the contest.
- A contestant must be enrolled in coursework at that institution at the time of the contest.
- They must have completed not less than one year of course work or equivalent by that institution's graduation rules.
- A student is ineligible to be a contestant if he/she has (1) competed in the North American Intercollegiate

Dairy Challenge National Contest, or (2) been an employee or paid consultant of any agricultural organization or service for which his/her duties included on-farm dairy consulting (excluding internships).

- A student may only participate/compete in two Dairy Challenge Academies, and one National Dairy Challenge contest.

The complete rules of the competition including eligibility are available on the [National Contest](#) page.

Academy Participation

- The Academy is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors from 4-year dairy programs, as well as undergraduates from community colleges and technical schools and graduate students.
- The program is offered to the first 120 students who register with the option to expand to 150 if needed. There is no limit on the number each school may register.
- Completed entries will receive priority by date, time of receipt, and previous regional or national participation. In the event the Academy size limits are reached, preference will be given to undergraduate students participating for the first time.

Academy Eligibility

- A Dairy Challenge Academy participant must be a student in a North American educational institution offering classes with an emphasis in dairy production.
- Participants must be enrolled in a program of study to meet the requirements for a bachelor's or graduate degree or be enrolled in a dairy/animal degree or certificate granting program and have completed one year or equivalent collegiate course work. Students, with or without a bachelor's degree, enrolled in graduate or professional studies programs also are eligible.
- A student is ineligible to participate if he/she has been an employee or paid consultant of any agricultural organization or service for which his/her duties included on-farm dairy consulting (excluding internships).

A student may only participate/compete in a total of two (2) Dairy Challenge Academies and one (1) National Dairy Challenge Contest. *New this year:*

- Exception to this rule will be made for students who participated in 2 regionals at a 2-year school, then transferred to a 4-year school. Those students will be eligible to participate in another regional at their 4-year school.
- Exception will also be made for students who participated in the National Contest (and thus graduated from Dairy Challenge) provided space is available.

Note to Coaches

On average, Dairy Challenge spends approximately \$650 per student attending the national contest and academy. With a \$100 per student registration fee, it is clear the important role our sponsors play in making this capstone opportunity available to students. As you select students from your school, we kindly ask you to consider the investment our sponsors are making on their behalf. Please ensure your students understand the privilege and exposure that is being extended to them. By registering they should understand the opportunity they are being given and are expected to fully participate in events and be willing to network with sponsors. Thank you!



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Tips for Registration

Eventbrite Registration Link - <https://2026NAIDCCContestandAcademy.eventbrite.com>

- All entries for both the National Contest and Academy should be submitted using the Eventbrite registration form.
- **Pay by credit card:**
 - Once you have entered the number of Registration Types (Contest Coach, Contest Student, Academy Coach, etc.), click on the green REGISTER button (see Image 1 below).
 - Upon completion of your registration information, you will be automatically redirected to another page with requests for additional information and to our PayPal site where you can enter your credit card information. You do not need a PayPal account to pay using this option.



- **Pay by check:**
 - Once you have entered the number of Registration Types (Contest Coach, Contest Student, Academy Coach, etc.), click on the “show other payment options” below the green REGISTER button. You will then be given the option to PAY OFFLINE by check. Please send your check by **February 12, 2026** payable to:

North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge
3310 Latham Drive, Madison, WI 53713
Attn: Jenna Langrehr
Phone: (608) 224-0400
Email: jlangrehr@wdexpo.com

Checks must be received by the February 12 deadline to confirm your registration.

- For schools participating in both the National Contest and the Academy who are sending one coach, please enter that coach's information under **both** Contest and Academy (there is a "copy" option for your convenience). TIP: utilize the "COPY DATA FROM" drop down option on the entry form to expedite your data entry for each coach/participant.
- If you have **additional** students beyond the initial allotment who are interested in the Contest (as a possible aggregate), please include their information when registering. We will contact you after February 12 if space is available to add additional students. You will notice that no payment is required now for these students - the registration for additional students is listed as "Free." Payment arrangements will be made once their participation is confirmed.
- If contest space doesn't allow for aggregate students, please consider if that student would be interested in participating in the Academy.
- If you have any questions, please contact Jenna Langrehr jlangrehr@wdexpo.com (608) 224-0400 or Molly Kelley at mollyk@dairychallenge.org (217) 493-3441.



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Travel Stipend Application Form

A pool of sponsor funds has been set aside to support national contest travel costs for schools in need. The stipend amount will depend on the number of applications approved. Schools must have a team competing in the national contest **and** must travel (driving or flying) at least 800 miles to be considered for the stipend. Deadline to submit this form: February 1, 2026. To help schools with their planning, recipients will be notified prior to the February 12, 2026 registration entry deadline.

☐ Yes, my school will be entering a team in the national contest.

Miles traveling (one way): _____

School: _____

Coach name: _____

Coach email: _____

Applicants should return this form to Jenna Langrehr via email

jlangrehr@wdexpo.com by February 1, 2026.