

News and Features
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UW DAIRY SCIENCE UNDERGRADS GET REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE WITH BADGER DAIRY CHALLENGE

Twenty-four UW-Madison dairy science students recently participated in the second annual Badger Dairy Challenge, a two-day event that took place Oct. 17 and 18 at area farms and on-campus.

Industry and university professionals developed Dairy Challenge as a practical, on-farm learning opportunity for students. Working in four-person teams, students observed and assessed all aspects of a working dairy farm and presented recommendations for improvement to a panel of judges made up of dairy professionals.

Maier Dairy of Waunakee, Wis., and Helt Farms of Dane, Wis., were the host farms for this year's competition.

The four-person teams were divided into two divisions. Students who had already completed the department's Dairy Herd Management course made up the "Legends" division. Students currently enrolled in the management class participated in the "Leaders" bracket.

The team of Max Luchterhand, Carrie Warmka, Anuj Modi and Jordan Ebert won top honors in the Legends division. Placing second was the foursome of Joe Mulcahy, Ryan Horsens, Ryan Pralle and Cody Getschel.

In the Leaders division, Andy Sell, Elizabeth Endres, Cassie Endres and Megan Opperman edged the group consisting of Lindsey Hellenbrand, Kayla Krueger, Rachel Hartlaub and Sara Harn for first place.

The Badger Dairy Challenge is an initiative of dairy science management instructor Ted Halbach. In an attempt to introduce students earlier in their undergraduate careers to the benefits of the competition, Halbach organized the Badger Dairy Challenge. His goal is to foster more interest among dairy science students to compete in Dairy Challenge at the regional and national level.

"We're trying to build a culture of enthusiasm for the competition among our undergraduates," he says. "I think a lack of familiarity with the contest has made some of our students timid when it comes to competing at the regional and national levels. We want them to gain confidence in their abilities and realize the benefits by first experiencing the event format with their peers."

Andy Sell, a dairy science sophomore from Watertown, Wis., and a member of the winning Leaders division team recognized the benefits of participating in the contest. “I was able to acquire more applied knowledge in the Challenge than some semester long classes I’ve taken. The hands-on format and opportunity to critically dissect individual areas of the operation really appealed to me. We had to balance what we saw in the records, our own visual observations and the farm’s management philosophies and goals to arrive at our final recommendations.”

Molly Sloan, global skills development specialist for Alta Genetics, served as one of the contest officials and said she was impressed by how students took what they had seen on their farm visits and used it to identify limitations for profitability and production.

Eight years ago, Sloan was a UW-Madison student competing in regional and national Dairy Challenges. Today, she attends the events in search of potential employees. “When I look to hire interns or full-time employees, one of the first things I look for on a resume is Dairy Challenge experience and exposure. It’s the single-best event available to students to prepare them for realistic situations they will face in the dairy business,” she said.

John Goeser, Rock River Laboratory and adjunct assistant professor in dairy science helped coordinate the contest. Other dairy professionals who generously donated their time to serve as officials included:

Leaders Division

Linda Behling, Vita Plus Corporation
Chelsea Brander, BMO Harris Bank
Jordan Matthews, Rosy-Lane Holsteins LLC
Jeff Hoeger, Genex Cooperative, Inc.
Johnie Ambrosy DVM, Waunakee Veterinary Service

Legends Division

Darin Bremmer, Vita Plus Corporation
Molly Sloan, Alta Genetics
Craig Carncross, Wargo Acres
Alan Miller DVM, Waterloo Veterinary Clinic
Rene Johnson, Union Bank & Trust Company

Rock River Laboratory, Inc., AgSource Cooperative Services and the UW Foundation’s David P. Dickson Student Activity Fund were program sponsors.

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Caption: Sara Harn, a dairy science sophomore from Brooklyn Wis., reviews the milking protocol at Helt Farms during the Badger Dairy Challenge.

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Caption (Right to Left) Joe Mulcahy, a dairy science senior from Dane, Wis., contest official Dr. Alan Miller, DVM and Ryan Horsens, a dairy science senior from Cecil, Wis., observe the milking routine at Maier Dairy during the Badger Dairy Challenge