

Michigan 4-H youth, alumni, and MSU students competed at the All-American Dairy Show dairy cattle judging contest

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Six alumni or current Michigan 4-H members represent the state at contest in Pennsylvania.



Michigan youth and MSU students traveled to compete at All-American Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest. From left: Cristin Theisen, Abby VanDyk, Rachael Bosse, Kristen Burkhardt, Drew Neyer, Miriah Dershem, Katelynn Webster, Adalee Thelen, and Katie Wilson. Photo courtesy Sarah Michalek.

A small group of 4-H members and MSU students arrived in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in mid-September to compete in the dairy cattle judging contest at the All-American Dairy Show hosted at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex. The All-American Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest (IYDCJC), in its 53rd year, had 101 participants on 29 teams across three divisions: 4-H, 2-year college, and collegiate.

The teams representing Michigan were: Katelynn Webster of Osceola County and Adalee Thelen of Clinton County on the 4-H team; Drew Neyer, Rachael Bosse, and Abby VanDyk on the 2-year team; and Kristen Burkhardt and Miriah Dershem on the collegiate team. Burkhardt, Dershem, Neyer, and VanDyk are all 4-H alumni who began their judging careers many years ago and have continued refining judging skills in their post-secondary education. Two additional 4-H youth, Katie Wilson and Cristin Theisen, both of Isabella County, traveled to observe the contest in preparation for future events.

The Michigan participants performed well, earning several mentions during the awards ceremony. Webster placed sixth overall and Thelen seventh overall in the 4-H contest as individuals. Webster was also second in the Ayrshire class; Thelen was second in Brown Swiss, sixth in Jersey, and ninth in oral reasons.

In the 2-year college division, the MSU Institute of Agricultural Technology (IAT) team placed fifth overall. Neyer and VanDyk earned individual awards in the Ayrshire class, 10th and eighth, respectively. Neyer also placed fourth in Guernsey, eighth in Jersey, and sixth in oral reasons. Bosse earned ninth place in Brown Swiss and 10th place in the Holstein classes.

Burkhardt, competing as an individual in the collegiate division, placed eighth overall as an individual, with additional recognition in the Ayrshire class (seventh) and oral reasons, seventh. Dershem, also competing as an individual, placed ninth in Brown Swiss and 10th in Holstein.

This was the first in-person contest since November 2019; the 2020 season was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The return to in-person judging brought both excitement and challenges in 2021. Having been away from competitive dairy judging for a year meant some potential team members lost their eligibility due to aging out of 4-H or graduating from MSU. Others were out of practice and needed time to bring their skills back to a competitive level. Overall, both coaches and team members were happy to be evaluating cattle, building community, and making connections in the national dairy industry once again.

“It has not been an easy road getting back to in-person judging this year - there have been many challenges along the way,” coach Joe Domecq said. “I am impressed by and proud of this small group of youth and students who put in the time to practice with little notice once we knew the contests were happening. Not knowing what contests would be held or what travel would look like, we paused. When we found out in August we would be able to meet for practices and travel, with health protocols in place, everyone came together quickly to make things happen.”

This was the first of three contests Michigan teams participated in this fall. The second contest was held during World Dairy Expo and the third during the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE).

To learn about the current program and history of dairy judging at MSU, visit the [Dairy Judging website](#).

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