

## MSU students and 4-H youth return to national dairy cattle judging contest at World Dairy Expo

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Two teams and two individuals represented Michigan State University and Michigan 4-H in Madison, Wisconsin.



Michigan dairy cattle judging coaches and participants celebrate their awards at World Dairy Expo. Back, from left: Coach Sarah Black, Coach Allison Schafer, Drew Neyer, Kristen Burkhardt, Miriah Dershem, Cristin Theisen, Adalee Thelen, and Coach Dr. Joe Domecq. Front, from left: Rachael Bosse, Abby VanDyk, Katie Wilson, and Katelynn Webster. Photo courtesy of Agri-Graphics.

In late September, the international dairy industry once again congregated in Madison, Wisconsin for World Dairy Expo. According to their website, World Dairy Expo “... serves as a forum for dairy producers, companies, organizations and other dairy enthusiasts to come together to compete, and to exchange ideas, knowledge, technology and commerce.” An integral part of this mission are the dairy cattle judging contests held for 4-H youth and students attending post-secondary institutions. The year 2021 saw the return of in-person dairy cattle judging contests, with Michigan youth and students participating in three divisions.

The National 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Contest is in its 99<sup>th</sup> year and had 63 individuals spread across 18 teams competing on the colored shavings in the Coliseum. Adalee Thelen of Clinton County, Cristin Theisen of Isabella County, Katelynn Webster of Osceola County, and Katie Wilson of Isabella County represented Michigan 4-H. Both the team and individuals earned several honors. The team placed ninth in the Ayrshire cattle class, 10<sup>th</sup> in Brown Swiss, sixth in Guernsey, seventh in Jersey, and eighth in oral reasons. Thelen was the third high individual in the Guernsey class and placed ninth overall in oral reasons. Theisen placed sixth in the Jersey cattle class.

Students in the MSU Institute of Agricultural Technology (IAT) competed in the 31<sup>st</sup> Post-Secondary International Dairy Cattle Judging Contest. The three MSU students were among 44 competitors on 15 teams. This was the second contest for the MSU IAT team of Rachael Bosse, Drew Neyer, and Abby VanDyk, all students in the Dairy Management certificate program. The team earned sixth place in Ayrshire, sixth place in Brown Swiss, sixth place in Guernsey, fifth place in Holstein, fourth place in Jersey, fifth place in Milking Shorthorns, seventh place in Red and White, fifth place in oral reasons, and sixth place overall in

the contest. Bosse took home second place in individual in the Ayrshire class and VanDyk was ninth in Jerseys. Neyer was 10<sup>th</sup> in Guernseys, sixth in Milking Shorthorns, and eighth overall in oral reasons. Neyer and VanDyk began their judging career in 4-H in their respective counties and earning spots on Michigan teams competing nationally before being students at MSU.

Two students, Kristen Burkhardt and Miriah Dershem, competed as individuals in the 100<sup>th</sup> National Intercollegiate Dairy Cattle Contest. Both students are seniors in the Agribusiness Management program and have been judging dairy cattle for over a decade, starting as 4-H members. There were 51 students competing on the 17 teams in the intercollegiate division. Burkhardt placed sixth in the Jersey cattle class and Dershem was fifth in the Red and White class.

Burkhardt, Dershem, and Thelen were named All-Americans during the awards ceremony. This title is earned by placing in the top 25 individuals in the collegiate or 4-H contest. Not only is this a national recognition of their dairy cattle judging skills, but Burkhardt, Dershem, and Thelen also earned additional scholarship eligibility through the National Dairy Shrine scholarship program. The National Dairy Shrine awards over \$40,000 annually for post-secondary education to the next generation of dairy leaders.

Coaches Joe Domecq, Sarah Black, and Allison Schafer helped the students and youth prepare for World Dairy Expo with practices where the young people were evaluating classes of four cattle and providing a justification for their placing (oral reasons). The coaches provide immediate feedback during practice to help the youth and students not only with visually evaluating the

animal compared to the ideal and the other cattle in the class, but also how to describe the cattle and make a convincing argument for their placing.

This was the second contest of the season for Michigan dairy cattle judging teams. The first was at the All-American Dairy Show in September and the season wraps up in November at the North American International Livestock Exposition.

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

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