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Midwest Dairy Challenge® Draws Largest Group of Students in 12 Years

MADISON, Wisc., February 8-10, 2017– Coming from 10 states across the Midwest, 112 students from 18 colleges and universities gathered in the heart of Madison, Wisc., for the 12th annual Midwest Dairy Challenge. Students came together to gain valuable life, career and dairy management skills, as Dairy Challenge allows collegiates to apply theory and learning on a real-world dairy farm while working as part of a team.

The Midwest event expanded in 2017, offering this premier opportunity to 40 additional students compared to previous years, as interest has steadily increased since the first regional event in 2005. “The Madison area is blessed with the necessary resources it takes to expand the Midwest contest,” states Ted Halbach, faculty associate in dairy management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and host of the 2017 Midwest event. “There are a number of progressive dairy operations within a 30-mile radius of campus and a concentration of industry professionals who serve them. We’re pleased to see a number of these folks now working for dairy businesses that have stepped forward as volunteers ‘to give back’ to a program that benefitted them as undergraduate students.”

The three-day event kicked off with seminars on a variety of topics to hone skills and information the students would use in the farm evaluation. Students participated in presentations from industry leaders on benchmarking financials, optimizing cow comfort, mining for data and utilizing PC Dart and DairyComp 305. During the first evening, teams of four to five students from different schools met, joined in team building and analyzed herd management data and farm financials. Each team was supported by two mentors from agribusiness or universities, who guided them through the data analysis and farm inspection.

On Thursday, February 9, teams visited one of three farms: Baerwolf Dairies of Sun Prairie, Balleweg Dairies of Sun Prairie and Manthe Farms of DeForest. Teams evaluated their respective farm to make recommendations in nutrition, reproduction, milking procedures, animal health, cow comfort and financial management. After working all afternoon on their presentations, students networked with agribusiness sponsors while participating in workshops on etiquette, interviews and career development.

On the third and final day, students presented their analysis to a panel of five judges and the farm owners. Each team delivered a 20-minute presentation on the strengths and areas of opportunity for their respective farm. Students also had the excellent industry networking opportunities with companies at an innovation fair and joined a panel of industry leaders on dairy environmental sustainability efforts.

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The judges awarded the following teams with the first and second place ranking among the eight total teams participating on each farm.

Farm 1, Baerwolf Dairies

First Place: Team 2, consisting of Ty Ax, University of Wisconsin-River Falls; Nicholas Leyendekker, Dordt College; Jessica Pralle, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jared Sanderson, Michigan State University; and Chelsea Schossow, South Dakota State University

Second Place: Team 4, including Savannah Fagerland, Chippewa Valley Technical College; Laura Jensen, University of Minnesota; Seth Kathman, College of the Ozarks; Greta Stridsberg, The Ohio State University; and Jacob Weg, South Dakota State University

Farm 2, Ballweg Dairies

First Place: Team 16, comprised of Emily Butler, Michigan State University; Sydney Endres, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Angela Evers, The Ohio State University; Blaine Knutson, University of Minnesota; and Michael Rottinghaus, Kansas State University

Second Place: Team 13, including Chad Bruss, University of Wisconsin-Platteville; James Goldsmith, Iowa State University; Courtney McCourt, University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Katie McMahon, University of Illinois

Farm 3, Manthe Farms

First Place: Team 21, consisting of Bradley Griswold, University of Wisconsin-Madison; John Maurer, Lakeshore Technical College; Audrey Schmitz, Kansas State University; and Amber Yager, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Second Place: Team 17, including Anthony Barta, Lakeshore Technical College; Lauren Engeman, University of Missouri; Fredrick Mansfield, University of Minnesota; and Mariah Schmitt, Iowa State University

"I am always impressed to see how dairy farms and the entire industry pulls together to give students interested in dairy production this tremendous learning and networking opportunity," concluded Halbach, who volunteered to repeat as host for the 2018 event.

The Midwest event is one of four regional contests sponsored each year by North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge® (NAIDC). These regional contests – plus a national event for about 250 dairy collegiates – are funded through generous support by 130 agribusinesses and dairy producers. Over its 15-year national history, Dairy Challenge has helped prepare nearly 5,000 students for careers as dairy owners or managers, consultants, researchers, veterinarians or other dairy professionals.

About Dairy Challenge

NAIDC 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, and agribusiness and university personnel. The 2017 national event will be March 30-April 1 in Visalia, CA; details are at www.dairychallenge.org.

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