

Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo Honors in on Dairy Judging Skills

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Summary and Implications

Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo has been a long standing program that has been in existence since the early 1980's. A donation from the Iowa State Dairy Association allowed a group to develop the Iowa Dairy Expo, now known as Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo. It began in 1984 at the Waterloo Cattle Congress as a dairy cattle judging show with commercial exhibits and informational seminars targeted mainly at dairy producers. As dairy farms changed and Iowa saw a decrease in dairy farms, the dairy sale diminished and locations changed from Waterloo to Dubuque to Decorah, and eventually to Calmar, Iowa. With the help of the Northeast Iowa Community College and Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation, a youth program was created for students interested in the dairy industry. With support from the dairy industry and business community, Iowa State University and NICC, this program has continued to educate and test youth's expertise in dairy cattle and dairy products judging contests.

Introduction

The Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo is held every year on the second Thursday in September. The contest takes place at the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation near the NICC Campus in Calmar, Iowa. In 2011, 396 FFA students participated in judging dairy cattle and dairy products from 17 chapters from Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Expo runs from 8:30 AM – 1:30 PM and draws students from up to an hour or more to hear the latest in dairy education.

Methods and Materials

The FFA students are divided into three focus groups by their advisor. The dairy products group focuses on learning and recognizing dairy products such as milk and cheese. Learning to judge milk and milk products is a totally separate contest from the dairy cattle judging; challenging both the mind and the taste buds. Dr. Stephanie Clark, ISU Associate Professor Food Science & Human Nutrition, begins by explaining to the group basic details of how to judge the quality differences of healthy consumer dairy products by using sensory evaluation skills. They then test their new skills by entering into an evaluation contest where each student is to identify and measure quality of dairy products. For most, this is the most exposure to the contest

they'll receive prior to the upcoming state FFA dairy products judging contest.

Those judging dairy cattle are separated into two groups; one judging cattle and giving oral reasons while the others judging dairy cattle only. There are four groups of four animals each. These animals have been halter trained, clipped, and washed prior to the event by the NICC Dairy Science Department. This gives nearly 50 NICC Dairy Science students practical experience of selecting, fitting and presenting dairy cattle. A professional sire analyst from one of the national artificial insemination companies serves as the official judge of the animals presented. Contestants are then asked to rank the animals on a scorecard that is then turned in and tabulated for a team and individual score. Participants giving oral reasons will then prepare a set of reasons why they ranked the animals the way they did. They present these reasons to identified judges who then score participants based on their ability to present oral reasons. This score is then added to the cattle judging score for an overall team and individual score.

During the day, participants also attend seminars on related dairy industry topics presented by industry professionals, Iowa State University, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach personnel, and Northeast Iowa Community College. Topics have included animal welfare, biosecurity, saving energy, and promoting the dairy industry. ISU Dairy Science students offer 2 topics that are presented every year. They include: "Giving Reasons in a Dairy Cattle Contest" and "Judging a Dairy Cow". The professional sire analyst who serves as the official judge also presents a demonstration on linear trait evaluation. Every other year, NICC Dairy Science students offer a tour of the dairy facility, allowing participants to learn more about a modern dairy farm and the hands-on learning that can take place by attending NICC.

Participants are offered education on schooling and careers within the dairy industry. "Opportunities From Grass to Glass" features a panel of people who work in the dairy industry (nutritionists, veterinarians, teachers, producers). This gives students an opportunity to ask questions about careers they may have interest in. NICC and ISU animal/dairy science advisors are also on site to help answer questions about courses offered, transferring between NICC and ISU, and careers available.

Results and Discussion

The Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo prepares participants for a State level FFA contest. However, long-term, this program aids in building self-confidence, developing judgment skills, and opens up new career opportunities for the next generation.

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Many of the contestants go on to further education after high school, and many attend NICC and/or ISU sometimes based on the experiences they've had at this program.

The Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo is organized by a board of directors representing several sectors of the dairy business. The board is comprised of the following members: President Ron Lenth; Vice President Roger Lenius, Swiss Valley Farms; Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer, Craig Morrison, LeRoy Messler, Waspie Valley Creamery; Carrie Corlett, Dairy Farmers of America; Jim Keunnen, Associated Milk Producers; Nate Gebel and Dave Lawstuen, Northeast Iowa Community College Ag Faculty; Mary Steen, Northeast Iowa Community College; Megan Kregel, Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation Coordinator; Carrie Courtney, Winneshiek County Extension Office; Jennifer Bentley, ISU Extension and Outreach; Randy Stephenson, Foremost Farms; and 2 second year students from the NICC Dairy Science Club. ISU Extension & Outreach county and field specialists serve as planning committee members and are involved with communications, seminars, registration, and scoring responsibilities.

Tri-State Dairy Youth Expo is supported and made possible by monetary and donations made by local businesses that support the program.