

## THE MANAGER

### GENERATION NEXT

By Deborah Grusenmeyer

Q & A with Chad Wall, a first-year veterinary student at Cornell University's veterinary college, on how to get the most out of your education

# You get back what you give

**Chad Wall, 23, grew up on a small livestock farm in Rodman, N.Y.** He and his three siblings raised pigs, goats, sheep and beef cattle. The animal menagerie gave the Wall children the opportunity to participate in 4-H projects. Wall graduated as valedictorian from South Jefferson (County) High School. Here's his take on how to make the most of educational opportunities.

**PRO-DAIRY:** Growing up, what careers did you consider?

**Wall:** I really didn't consider any other career options. I've known since middle school that I wanted to be a veterinarian after a disease infected our flock of sheep, and all of them had to be put down. I knew then that I wanted to be in agriculture to help others with their animals and management systems. What I didn't know until I came to Cornell were the options available in the vet field.

**PD:** What activities did you participate in during high school that broadened your agriculture experience and knowledge?

**Wall:** Besides 4-H, I was an FFA member. With both

4-H and FFA, I was involved in different educational activities at the county, state and national levels. I also participated in our regional yearlong dairy youth program, called Dairy Prospects, as a way to get more experience in the dairy industry. After that I was selected into the Junior DAIRY LEADER program during my senior year.

**PD:** What about your college education?

**Wall:** I applied and was accepted into SUNY Cobleskill, Morrisville State College and Cornell University. I decided to come to Cornell and graduated in 2010 with a degree in animal science with a dairy focus. (Wall received a Graduate with Distinction in Research in Animal Science for his honors thesis on cattle nutrition with Dr. Mike VanAmburgh.)

While at Cornell, I took advantage of study trips, going to New Zealand for a semester to learn more about a different agricultural system. Also, I spent a week on the West Coast looking at dairies and other agricultural businesses like citrus and almonds.

Through Cornell's Dairy Club, I went to Italy and Germany and learned more about global agriculture and its impacts on U.S. agriculture.

A trip with Dairy Fellows took me to north Texas, Florida and Georgia where I learned about dairy management systems in the South. While in the program, we discussed management with producers and were encouraged to apply for internships.

Dairy Fellows played a big part in my learning how to evaluate a dairy business. I also learned about being part of a management team and how to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses as part of a team.

I was also a member of Cornell's team for the National Dairy Challenge held in California. All of these experiences gave me opportunities to network with industry leaders and professionals.

Between my freshman and sophomore years at



**What opportunity didn't Chad Wall take advantage of as he prepared for veterinary school? Not many, and they've all served him well as a way to integrate his education and practical experience.**

## FYI

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Cornell, I interned on a 1,700-cow dairy. This was my first work experience on a dairy. I learned to milk in a double-24 parlor and to better understand many aspects of herd health and management.

I spent the last two summers as an undergraduate, plus my junior and senior years at Cornell, working on my honors thesis on cattle nutrition with Dr. VanAmburgh. Through my research project I learned more about the opportunities in public health and pharmaceuticals.

**PD:** Any tips for other young people on how to make the most of their education?

**Wall:** I would encourage young people to take advantage of the

opportunities like Collegiate Dairy Challenge, Dairy Fellows, Junior DAIRY LEADER, Dairy Prospects and research for an honors thesis. Programs like Junior DAIRY LEADER got me out of my comfort zone before I headed to college. It also made adjusting to college a lot easier.

In vet school I'm applying to an externship program to learn how to integrate my knowledge of livestock and production systems into my vet medicine career path. I want to avoid being vet smart but not production management system smart or vet smart but not industry smart.

You get out of any opportunity what you put into it. Keep an open mind and don't be afraid of going after opportunities. □

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can't ask someone to do something you haven't done. I learn a lot by accepting challenges and working through them.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

**What can you tell other young people about succeeding as a dairy manager?**

**Beller:** Get off your own farm and work for someone else before coming home. When you do come back home, make sure there is an agreed-upon plan. What will your role and responsibilities be? Some other tips are:

- Earn the respect of employees and owners. Sometime you need to shut up and realize your ideas might not be best.
- Push hard in areas you're responsible for but yield in other areas.
- Work with a team of advisers to get feedback and build support for your ideas.
- After adequate thought and input from others, make decisions and move forward. Give your decision time but be prepared to change course if needed.

**Durfee:** Be willing to work your way up the ladder to having responsibility for making decisions. This means doing all the jobs from night milking to feeding and crop work.

Change is constant so you can never stop learning. If you do, you'll be left in the dust.

**Post:** I would say that not coming home to work right after college was the best decision that I could have made for my career. When you come out of Cornell, you think you know everything. You may know a lot but not how to apply it. You've got to know you don't know everything. Continually educate yourself; let yourself be challenged.

**Richardson:** You need to know where you are to know if you're going forwards or backwards in the day-to-day management and to establish goals. Being organized and good with such management tools as Dairy Comp are important.

### THE NETWORK

**What do you do to stay in touch with others in the industry?**

**Beller:** I'm in a young producers' discussion group with about 12 people. We meet a few times a year, but I communicate regularly with a couple of the members.

To improve my skills to manage the dairy herd, employees and finance, I attend six to eight educational meetings a year. I look for ones that are relevant and challenging. Lately I've been a speaker at several of them

I'm in regular contact with farm advisers – veterinarian, nutritionist, Extension – and seek input on management decisions.

**Durfee:** Graduating in three years and returning home right away, I limited my opportunities to participate in some Cornell programs, such as spending a semester abroad. But I've never stopped learning and developing additional experiences. I read as many magazines as I can and use this information as a basis for questions and discussions with classmates from Cornell, agri-service providers, consultants and the dairy advisory team that works with us.

I chair the Madison County Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Rancher committee and I'm on the county's Agricultural Economic Development Committee.

**Post:** I can network with my AGR fraternity brothers and Dairy Fellows. I'm also in a Dairy Profit Discussion group that meets twice a year. We get together for two days and talk to each other about everything. I'm also vice president of Genesee County Farm Bureau.

**Richardson:** I really enjoy my time at home with my family which includes two children. I work at balancing family and work.

I have opportunities to participate in workshops, webinar trainings and educational programs. I read a lot, including dairy magazines and research reports on-line. I consult with dairy industry groups like QMPS (Quality Milk Production Services), veterinarians and nutritionists.

### GROWTH MODE

**What's your plan for the future?**

**Beller:** Long term, I'd like to have more management responsibility. I have a fear of getting bored and expect I'll someday oversee others doing many of the things I do now.

**Durfee:** With all the changes that occurred since I've come home, and more changes planned, I'm still excited about the opportunity to be on my home farm. We're planning to build a parlor this spring and move toward a 500-cow herd.

**Post:** Our goal is to have eight robots, up from our current four robots, milking the entire herd. We may expand to about 500 cows. Our older milking parlor where we now milk about 130 of our cows – the other approximately 220 are in the six-row barn with robots – has only so much left to give back to us.

**Richardson:** I'm really happy where I am and enjoy what I do at Willet Dairy. □