

BUSINESS REINVESTMENT

By Debbie Grusenmeyer and Julie Berry

# Programs to develop future dairy leaders and feed the dairy career pipeline

Viable businesses of the future need high caliber youth with a positive outlook, open mind and enthusiasm. Add math, science and decision making skills, and it's hard to go wrong.

The dairy industry is a viable business of the future: growing and dynamic. An honest look at the dairy industry and its success reveals it as a cutting-edge and forward-thinking industry poised for greatness. So ask the question, "How do we keep the supply of human resources needed for the future of the dairy industry flowing into the pipeline?"

Today's youth are certainly involved in a laundry list of programs and classes at school that contribute to their formal education, but key programs that dairy-interested youth participate in puts them ahead of the pack. Enhancing math, science, engineering, critical thinking and decision making skills is a focus of school districts.

4-H Dairy is one program, from the county to state level, that does just that and fosters the development of future dairy leaders. The NYS 4-H Youth Development Program is housed in the Animal

**Dairy-focused education programs build interest in ag careers.**

Science Department at Cornell University. All year youth ages 8 to 19 can participate in 4-H Animal Science activities that focus on dairy, starting on the local level with their Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Programs. Networking, combining resources and sharing ideas provides the opportunities for these youth to excel to a regional and state level.

Youth ages 14 to 19 compete to attend a National or US Regional competition. Every year, youth are selected based on their knowledge, skill and performance at state level competitions. Youth who participate in 4-H Animal Science have a strong interest in all aspects of the dairy industry, dairy production management and the dairy science field. The knowledge and experience gained from these events last a lifetime, while they also build life skills in communication, critical thinking, decision making, technology and career planning.

Dairy Challenge is one such skill-a-thon event. Youth at all age levels participate on a local level at their county fairs, and later at the state contest, coordinated by the Cornell PRO-DAIRY Program and 4-H Extension Educators, and held at the NY State Fair. The top four senior level youth become the NY State 4-H Dairy Management Team to compete at the Junior Dairy Management Contest held at the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, PA.

The Dairy Challenge and Junior Dairy Management Contest are educational activities that provide participants an excellent opportunity to evaluate top quality animals, receive experience in evaluation and decision-making, and demonstrate knowledge and skills in dairy management through stations in dairy cattle selection, linear trait analysis, diseases and biosecurity, dairy cattle health and management, meats and dairy product evaluation, feed management, identification of grains, forages and by-products, biology of lactation and mastitis, dairy product evaluation, facilities, farm safety, and farm business management.

This well-rounded approach helps dairy youth learn and creates dairy producers



4-H Dairy Challenge contestants at the 2015 NY State Fair participate in a skills station.



Ellie Ainslie

of the future. For some who are not from a farm, this exposure peaks their interest to consider a career in the dairy industry.

“It’s an amazing industry. It keeps growing and you need people to support it. I want to pursue a career with some agriculture base, not necessarily milking cows. I keep finding different things that I find interesting,” said Ellie Ainslie at this year’s contest at NY State Fair. She is a high school junior and doesn’t currently live on a farm, but has participated in the contest through Otsego County 4-H

since she was 8. “It’s really important. It’s more than just cows. It’s teaching responsibility and leadership. It’s not just information.”

Josh Chisholm’s grandfather owned a farm, but the Jefferson County resident does not live on one. The high school senior does, however, choose to work on one and is interested in pursuing agriculture business at college. His interest is fed in part through participation in dairy related programs.

“Dairy Challenge is very challenging,” he said. “It’s a good way to meet people and test your skills. I test what I learn at work and it helps me to expand my knowledge.”

Chisolm also graduated in August from the Junior DAIRY LEADER program.

“It was a special opportunity,” he said. “Agriculture is a growing industry and Junior DAIRY LEADER is a good way for youth to gain exposure into the agriculture industry and build leadership and public speaking skills.”

**Dairy Cattle Judging** is another activity that contributes to development of dairy industry leaders. To be a good breeder and feeder, and to cope with management problems, a dairy producer must know how to judge and observe his cattle. A dairy producer needs to understand and recognize the best and most functional qualities in his or her dairy cattle to run a dairy business with quality animals. All interested youth start by learning about the different dairy breeds and specific breed characteristics for the ideal animal. As they grow older, they rank from top to bottom a class of similar aged animals, and develop a set of oral reasons to justify their decision. Learning to judge dairy cattle helps develop confidence to make and defend good decisions, which are skills needed in almost every aspect of life. Participants learn careful observation, thoughtful evaluation, intelligent decision making and justification of the decision, which equals organized thinking. Each fall twelve youth earn a seat on one of three different 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Teams to compete at the national contest in Wisconsin, or regional contest in



Josh Chisholm

Harrisburg, PA or Louisville, KY.

**4-H Dairy Bowl** is the Jeopardy-like contest of the dairy field. Teams of youth work for top honors by testing their knowledge on many levels of dairy business, biology and current industry issues. The National 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl is one of the nation’s most challenging contests for dairy industry youth and is dedicated to providing youth with an opportunity to expand their educational horizons.

The future of the dairy industry depends on well-rounded and knowledgeable young people who are positive and forward-thinking about the industry. Youth participating in these 4-H Dairy activities gain the depth and breadth of knowledge and growth needed to do just that. For more information about these or other 4-H activities, contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office. □

*Debbie Grusenmeyer (djc27@cornell.edu) is a Senior Extension Associate and coordinates youth programs for PRO-DAIRY. Julie Berry (jrb7@cornell.edu) is Communications Manager for PRO-DAIRY.*

## Junior DAIRY LEADER Program

*“Preparing our Young People for Successful Careers in the Dairy Industry”*

The PRO-DAIRY initiated and directed Junior DAIRY LEADER program has introduced over 300 youth to dairy careers and enhanced their skills and knowledge through a year-long experience of workshops, hands-on activities and travel.

Youth between the ages of 16 to 19 who have an interest in exploring careers in the dairy industry gain a realistic view of the dairy industry as a viable, profitable and progressive business sector, while also building personal and professional skills.

The program consists of a series of workshops that focus on multiple facets of the dairy industry, personal development and technical skills. Through visits to Wisconsin, the National 4-H Dairy Conference, and agribusinesses in NY, youth interact with with professionals who have enthusiastic attitudes about the dairy industry. Youth:

- Prepare for successful careers in the dairy industry.
- Gain an in-depth understanding of the dairy industry’s scope and opportunities.
- Are exposed to progressive and profitable agricultural businesses.
- Learn communication and teamwork skills that aid in problem solving.
- Explore and enhance their career planning through discussions with dairy industry leaders.
- Develop personal, professional and leadership skills necessary to make positive contributions to the dairy industry.
- Obtain work experience in the dairy field.
- Develop technical skills through training workshops.