

# Beyond the show-ring: opportunities for dairy youth

by Jeffrey Bewley

**T** IRED of finishing in the middle of the pack in the show-ring? Enjoy judging dairy cattle and wish that there were enough people in your area to field a dairy judging team? Are you looking for a new dairy activity and just haven't seemed to have found it?

Is this beginning to sound familiar to any of you? Growing up on a small-grade dairy farm in Kentucky, I once experienced these feelings. The good news is there are plenty of activities you can become involved in. You just need to find them.

Dr. George Heersche, dairy youth extension specialist with the University of Kentucky, helped



**THE JUNIOR TEAM FROM WASHINGTON** (left to right) Liz Soler, Charlie Warner, Hannah Zylstra, and Timmy Lee Frohning, prepare to answer a bonus question at the 2003 National Junior Holstein Convention.

me do just that. Through talking with him, I was able to find many other ways to start my career in the dairy industry. Opportunities like the National 4-H Dairy Conference in Madison, Wis., during World Dairy Expo, dairy quiz bowl contests across the state and country, and later in college, the American Dairy Science Association-Student Affiliate Division.

### More than showing and judging . . .

Showing and judging dairy animals provides a great way for youth to develop a strong work ethic, a love of the dairy industry, and a sense of responsibility. The benefits of participating in these key activities are limitless. But maybe you have determined that these activities are not feasible in your area. Or you have participated in these activities and are looking for more. It only takes a quick discussion with an extension agent or a simple search on the internet to locate plenty of other dairy activities you can participate in. Take a look at the websites and information in this article to learn more about these activities.

### Why do it . . .

With any extracurricular activity, you will gain skills and experiences that will better prepare you for life after graduation. For example, dairy quiz bowls are an exciting chance to compete against other individuals in a competition that requires quick recall of information you have learned about dairy farming. Teamwork is also developed from participating in a dairy quiz bowl. Being able to work with others towards a common goal is an essential skill in the work place.

Tours provide another way to expand your knowledge of dairying. Visually observing what

happens on another farm or in another part of the country can broaden your knowledge of the industry. While printed materials and classrooms are a great place to learn about the science behind the decisions you make on a dairy, in reality, practices and ideas will work differently in different settings. Seeing different operations helps you to see what some of these limitations may be.

In order to come up with varied and effective solutions as a future dairy leader, it helps to have seen farms of different styles and sizes. You may even get a new idea for something that can be implemented on your home farm. Or maybe you can find a new idea for a science project to wow your friends at school and teach others about agriculture.

Problem solving is another skill you will develop in working through challenges that a real-life herd may face. Being able to evaluate an entire operation and come up with feasible solutions based on your experience and solid scientific knowledge is an important skill for any aspiring dairy professional to have.

Even beyond the dairy industry, individuals who are truly effective in their jobs are able to handle stress and come up with creative solutions to complex problems. Dairy management contests provide an excellent opportunity to come up with solutions in a team setting and have these ideas critiqued by experienced mentors. You will gain useful skills in these activities that you can apply to whatever career path you take.

To be successful in these contests, you will need knowledge in all facets of dairy herd management, including nutrition, genetics, reproduction, health, record keeping, finances, and so forth. Too often, especially those in college, we get caught up in a specific interest within the industry and

fail to study other areas. As an example, for years, my interest was in dairy cattle genetics; however, I am now working for an animal nutrition company. It is important for us to keep the big picture in mind as you never know where your career might take you.

In all of these dairy youth activities, you will meet many new friends and industry contacts. Called "networking," these contacts will prove invaluable as you move through your career. It is amazing how often the old adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know," comes true. It is also fun to meet people who share similar interests with you. Maybe you will meet a new pen pal or lifelong friend.

And we haven't even mentioned how much fun you will have in these activities. They generally include "free time," sports, swimming, and other social activities. You will travel to see new cities and states. You may even get to stay on campus and check out potential colleges.

### Start looking now!

Whether you are in middle school, high school, or college, opportunities abound. Work with your county extension office, your state dairy extension professionals, your FFA advisor, breed associations, and other dairy companies to learn what may be available for you. Don't be afraid to ask questions and open doors. These competitions and conferences will help prepare you for a long-term career in the dairy industry. The skills, knowledge, and contacts you gain will only become more important. And you will have a great time doing it! The future of the dairy industry will depend on highly motivated individuals such as you to solve problems and handle issues facing the dairy industry. Start now!

Event	Description	Website	Contact
National 4-H Dairy Conference	Students from across the United States and Canada gather for workshops, lectures, tours, other education activities, social and recreational activities	<a href="http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/dairyconf/">http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/dairyconf/</a>	Kay Hobler <a href="mailto:kay.hobler@uwex.edu">kay.hobler@uwex.edu</a> (608) 262-1557
Dairy Quiz Bowls	Contest designed with dairy topic questions; includes a written exam and an oral, "game-show" style quiz. Contests at local, state, and national levels.	<a href="http://www.4-h.org/">http://www.4-h.org/</a> <a href="http://www.ffa.org/">http://www.ffa.org/</a> <a href="http://www.holsteinusa.com/">http://www.holsteinusa.com/</a>	Local extension office, state land grant universities, or breed associations
Badger Dairy Camp	Youth activity camp focusing on fitting and showing of dairy cattle, judging, and dairy science related workshops	<a href="http://www.uwex.edu/ces/dairyouth/bdcamp.html">http://www.uwex.edu/ces/dairyouth/bdcamp.html</a>	Ted Halbach Dairy Science Dept. 1675 Observatory Drive Madison, WI 53706-1284 <a href="mailto:halbach@calshp.cals.wisc.edu">halbach@calshp.cals.wisc.edu</a>
Southeastern Dairy Youth Retreat	Youth from across the Southeast gather for industry tours, educational activities, judging clinics, and social outings	<a href="http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/dairy/4-H/seyouthretreat/seydairyouthretreatpage.htm">http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/dairy/4-H/seyouthretreat/seydairyouthretreatpage.htm</a>	Lori McBryde Animal Science Dept. NCSU Campus Box 7621 Raleigh, NC 27695-7621 <a href="mailto:Lori_McBryde@ncsu.edu">Lori_McBryde@ncsu.edu</a>
New York Junior Dairy Leader Program	Leadership conference developed for high school aged students with an interest in the dairy industry with educational workshops, leadership seminars, and farm visits.	<a href="http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy/youth/main.html">http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy/youth/main.html</a>	Deborah Clute <a href="mailto:djc27@cornell.edu">djc27@cornell.edu</a> (607) 255-0656

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