

## Michigan 4-H dairy judging team takes top honors at international judging contest

Melissa Elischer - November 11, 2015

Four Michigan youth took team and individual top honors in Louisville, Kentucky at the North American International Livestock Exposition Invitational Dairy Judging Contest.



The 2015 NAILE Michigan 4-H Dairy Judging Team, from left: Allison Schafer, Skylar Buell, Cameron Cook, Madeline Meyer and Dr. Joe Domecq. Photo credit: Jessica Jakubik | MSU Extension

The North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) Invitational Dairy Judging Contest is the final stop of the season for the national Michigan 4-H dairy judging teams. To be selected for the state team, youth began practicing early in the summer in

preparation for the state judging contest that occurred on the Wednesday of 4-H Youth Dairy Days. At that contest, seniors (ages 15-19) with the top 25 high scores as individuals were invited to participate in additional practices over the summer, including a weekend-long intensive practice at the Maryland State Fair over Labor Day. After taking all the summer scores and practices attended in to consideration, three teams were chosen to compete at different national contests: the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin; and the NAILE in Louisville, Kentucky.

Representing Michigan in the NAILE contest this year was Cameron Cook and Allison Schafer of Clinton County, Madeline Meyer from Ionia County, and Skylar Buell from Monroe County. This was the first national judging contest for Buell and Meyer; Schafer and Cook competed in Harrisburg in 2014.

The contest took place on Sunday with teams judging ten classes of dairy cattle and delivering four sets of oral reasons. Each of the ten classes consisted of four similarly-aged cattle of the same breed that participants had to rank from the best to worst. For four of these ten classes, youth then had to defend their ranking to a judge in a short speech. Each class and set of reasons was worth a maximum of 50 points and scores were cumulative for each individual and team for the contest.

With 25 4-H teams from across the country competing, Michigan took top honors as the highest-scoring overall team and highest-scoring team in reasons as well. Other honors the team received were high placing team for the Jersey and Brown Swiss classes and second in the Guernsey breed.

Individuals on the team were also recognized for their accomplishments. Cook had the 10th highest individual score overall and eighth in reasons; Schafer was fourth overall; and Meyer was second in both overall score and reasons, the high individual in the Jersey and Holstein classes, receiving a perfect score of 50 for her reasons in the Jersey breed. Schafer also placed third in Jerseys and Meyer was fifth in Guernseys.

Dr. Joe Domecq, academic specialist in the Department of Animal Science and advisor of the Ag Tech Dairy Management Program who oversees coaching of the 4-H, collegiate and ag tech teams, said, “These four youth have been judging for years, working hard to improve their skills, and they had a great day at the contest. I am very proud of their hard work, growth as individuals, and know the Michigan dairy industry will be in good hands with these young people. I am also very grateful for the many individuals, some of which are Michigan dairy judging alumni themselves, who invited the teams to visit farms for practice, worked with the youth on seeing the cows and delivering reasons, and provided so much support for the program.”

Reflecting on her experience, Buell stated “The contest was a lot of fun. It was great to see all our hard work from the past few years pay off. I’m so proud of our team and how well we did.”

Cook agrees, “It was an amazing opportunity to compete at NAILE. I’m very fortunate to have shared this experience with such amazing teammates. It is always nice to see all the dedication and hard work come together and pay off.”

When asked about the contest, Schafer commented: “It was a great experience and I’m thankful I had the opportunity to work with such amazing teammates!”

Meyer concurred with her teammate and coach, saying “This is yet another awesome experience I have had through the Michigan 4-H dairy program. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent Michigan by traveling and competing with my fellow 4-H’ers who have become more like family to me. It is rewarding to see all the weekends spent practicing paying off at my first national contest and this makes me eager to see what we will be able to do in future competitions!”

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