

Clinton and Calhoun County youth compete in national dairy judging contest

Melissa Elischer - September 19, 2016

Four 4-H members from Clinton and Calhoun counties travel to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to compete in dairy judging contest during the 2016 All-American Dairy Show.



The top 25 seniors from the 2016 Michigan 4-H Dairy Judging Contest celebrate their accomplishments with a group photo at the awards dinner at the end of 4-H Youth Dairy Days. Photo: Sara Long.

Every July, youth from across the state participate in 4-H Youth Dairy Days which is part of Michigan Dairy Expo, the largest annual dairy event in Michigan. During this week-long celebration of the Michigan dairy industry, youth have the opportunity to compete in multiple educational events. These events allow youth to demonstrate not only dairy knowledge, but other important life skills learned through 4-H, the youth development program of Michigan State University Extension.

The Dairy Cattle Judging Contest is the third contest of the week. The Dairy Cattle Judging contest requires youth rank a class of four cows or heifers from best – the animal closest to meeting breed standards as found in the PDCA Score Card – to worst – the animal least like the breed standard. Judging contests like this help youth to development many important life skills, including time management (youth generally have 12-15 minutes to judge a class and take notes on the animals), critical thinking and decision making (as they rank the animals).

Additionally, two divisions in the contest also help contestants improve public speaking as participants must then give a short speech stating why they ranked the cows in the order they did. Youth who participate in dairy judging find it to be a very valuable experience that can bring many new opportunities, including international travel and global perspectives.

During Michigan 4-H Youth Dairy Days, participants can compete in teams of three or four or as individuals in one of three age groups: novice (9-11 years old), junior (9-14 years old) or senior (15-18 years old). Scores from the eight classes of cattle evaluated and reasons are totaled to rank both teams and individuals. Senior youth who rank in the top 25 participants are then invited to participate in statewide practices to determine the

national dairy judging team members. In 2016, there were seven novice teams, 10 junior teams and 13 senior teams participating in the state contest.

Representing Michigan 4-H at the [All-American Dairy Show](#) in [Harrisburg, Pennsylvania](#), are three youth from Clinton County and one youth from Ingham County: Miriah Dershem from St. Johns, Carmen Hicks from St. Johns, Morgan Luoma from East Leroy and Hope McAlvey from Sumner. These four youth attended multiple practices hosted by dairy farms throughout Michigan, as well as traveled to the [Maryland State Fair](#) for a four-day workout to determine which dairy judging contest they would compete in.

4-H Youth Dairy Days and the educational contests held that week are just one example of [science](#) programming available through [MSU \(Michigan State University\) Extension](#). [Michigan State University Extension](#) and the [Michigan 4-H Youth Development](#) program helps to create a community excited about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). 4-H STEM programming seeks to increase science literacy, introducing youth to the experiential learning process that helps them build problem-solving, critical-thinking and decision-making skills. Youth who participate in 4-H STEM content are better equipped with critical life skills necessary for future success. To learn more about the positive impact of Michigan 4-H youth in [STEM literacy](#) programs, read our 2015 Impact Report: "[Building Science Literacy and Future STEM Professionals](#)."

For more information about 4-H Youth Dairy Days or other youth dairy science programming, please contact [Melissa Elischer](mailto:elischer@anr.msu.edu) at elischer@anr.msu.edu.

This article was published by **Michigan State University**

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