

4-H members travel to Louisville for final dairy judging contest of the season

Melissa Elischer - November 3, 2016

Four Michigan youth prepare for the last dairy judging contest of the 2016 season at the North American International Livestock Exposition.



4-H members evaluate cattle during the state dairy cattle judging contest. Photo: Melissa Elischer, MSU Extension.

The North American International Livestock Exposition runs Nov. 1-17, 2016, and marks the end of the 2016 dairy cattle judging season for Michigan youth. The

North American International Livestock Exposition 4-H Dairy Judging Contest takes place Nov. 6 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Kentucky. Four youth will represent Michigan at this national judging contest: Kristen Burkhardt of Livingston and Kent counties, Lance Frahm of Saginaw County, Morgan Luoma of Calhoun County and Hope McAlvey of Clinton County. These youth have been practicing nearly every Saturday since August, refining their dairy cattle assessment skills and polishing their reasons delivery. This will be third national 4-H judging contest Frahm has participated in during his 4-H career, the second for Luoma and McAlvey, and the first for Burkhardt.

These youth, along with dozens of other 4-H members from across the state, competed in the state 4-H dairy judging contest during 4-H Youth Dairy Days this past July, 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 during 4-H Youth Dairy Days is the third contest of the week. During the contest, 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 the animal least like the breed standard. Judging contests like this help youth develop 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, judging contests help participants practice and improve public speaking as they give a short speech stating why they ranked the animals 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.

At Michigan 4-H Youth Dairy Days, youth participate in the contest as teams of three to four, judging eight classes of cattle and giving three sets of reasons. These scores are totaled to rank both teams and individuals. Youth in the senior division who rank in the top 25 participants are then invited to participate in state-wide practices to determine the national dairy judging team members. In 2016, there were 13 senior teams participating in the state contest, with more than 50 individuals participating.

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. MSU (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 to 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 me at elischer@anr.msu.edu or 517-432-4306.

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