Michigan 4-H alumni and members sweep Jersey breed class and earn top honors at All-American Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest

Melissa Elischer - October 11, 2018

Three teams representing Michigan competed at the All-American Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on September 17.

Michigan 4-H team from left to right: Black, Cook, Theisen, VanderMolen and Coach Domecq.

Three teams representing Michigan competed at the All-American Invitational Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Contest in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on September 17. This was the 50th annual event held in conjunction with the All-American Dairy Show. Contestants judged ten classes of dairy cattle and gave four or five sets of oral reasons to justify their placings on a given class.

Competing in the 4-H division of the competition were Michigan 4-H'ers Ian Black from Eagle, Miriam Cook from Pewamo, Caitie Theisen from Mt. Pleasant, and Jacob VanderMolen from Allendale. The team placed fifth overall (out of twelve teams) and third in oral reasons. Individually, Cook placed fifth overall (out of 46 participants) and second in oral reasons, while Theisen placed fifth overall in oral reasons.

In the individual breed placings, Black placed eighth in the Ayrshire cattle classes and sixth in Brown Swiss. Both Cook and Theisen placed well in the Guernsey division, winning first and third, respectively, and VanderMolen placed eighth in the Holstein breed. Three of the four team members placed high in the Jersey class, with Black winning first, Theisen winning second and Cook placing fourth.

The team also took home top honors in the Jersey class, while placing fourth in the Brown Swiss and Guernsey classes.

"My experiences in Harrisburg were amazing," said Theisen. "Getting to travel to another state is an adventure on its own, but when you pair an adventure with great friends and doing what you love, it becomes so much more. It becomes part of you and an everlasting memory of laughter and fun. Top that off with viewing

beautiful cows, there's nothing better. If you are lucky enough to win a few ribbons, that's a bonus to all the other memories created."

Competing in the 2-year junior college team division were Gerrit Baker from Byron Center, Kristen Burkhardt from Fowlerville, Miriah Dershem from St. Johns and Rebeka McDonald from Conklin. All four are students in Michigan State University's Institute of Agricultural Technology Dairy program and Michigan 4-H alumni.

The team placed sixth overall in the contest and fifth in oral reasons. Individually, Burkhardt placed ninth in oral reasons. In the breed classes, both the team and Baker placed second in the Brown Swiss class. The team also did well in the Jersey breed class, taking home first place, while Dershem received the highest score as an individual and Burkhardt took second.

"I loved having the opportunity to spend the weekend in Harrisburg judging dairy cattle with my teammates," said Baker. "We are more than teammates, these are my best friends and I could not be more proud of what we accomplished in Pennsylvania."

Also competing from MSU in the 4-year collegiate division were Cameron Cook of Pewamo, Madeline Meyer of Ionia, Makayla Petter of Hastings and Allison Schafer of Westphalia. These team members, most of whom are Michigan 4-H alumni, are all seeking agriculture-related bachelor's degrees.

Overall, the team placed seventh out of 15 teams and took home first in oral reasons. Individually, Cook placed ninth overall (out of 59 participants) and fifth in oral reasons, while Meyer placed third in oral reasons. The team also won the Brown Swiss breed class, with Cook placing third and Meyer placing seventh. In the Guernsey breed, Meyer placed fourth and Cook placed ninth. The team rounded out the Michigan team Jersey sweep by winning the breed with Meyer also placing sixth as an individual.

Collegiate - Schafer, Petter, Meyer, Cook, Domecq

"This was a great contest to start the judging season," said Schafer. "The team is happy with how we did and we are looking forward to judging at future competitions."

Head coach, Joe Domecq, Ph.D., is an academic specialist in the MSU Department of Animal Science. Domecq said he was proud of each team's accomplishments.

"Dairy judging is a tremendous learning experience. It's not about the cows, it's about the life skills, team work and network building the students learn along the way," Domecq said.

Support for team travel would not be possible without team fundraising efforts and many sponsors. Major contributors to the state dairy cattle judging program include the NorthStar Cooperative, ABS Global, the Michigan Dairy Memorial Scholarship Foundation, the Michigan Holstein Association, the Michigan Jersey Association, the Michigan Milk Producer Association, Michigan Farm Bureau and the Michigan Youth Livestock Scholarship Foundation Dairy Fund.

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