Michigan 4-H members and MSU students compete at World Dairy Expo, Ag Tech Team earns invitation to Europe

Melissa Elischer - November 2, 2018

> Two teams and one individual representing Michigan competed at the National Dairy Cattle Judging Contest at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin, on October 1.

2018 Michigan 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Team at World Dairy Expo (from left) Coach Sarah Black, Miriam Cook, Ian Black, Jessica Nash, Caitie Theisen, Coach Joe Domecq. (Photo courtesy www.agrigraphics.com.)

Two teams and one individual representing Michigan competed at the National Dairy Cattle Judging Contest at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin, on October 1. Post-secondary and collegiate participants judged twelve classes of cattle and gave five sets of oral reasons to justify their placings on a given class, while 4-H members judged ten classes and gave five sets of oral reasons.

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 Jessica Nash from St. Johns. Overall, the team placed eighth in oral reasons and sixteenth overall. Cook also placed eighth as an individual in oral reasons. In the individual breed classes, the team placed sixth in Brown Swiss, third in Guernsey and seventh in Jersey. Cook also placed well in the individual breed classes, placing eighth in Guernsey, and seventh in Jersey.

"Walking into this, I knew that judging in Madison at the World Dairy Expo was a blessing not many people get to have," reflected Cook. "The expectations are high, the competition deep and the cattle beautiful. It wouldn't have mattered how the results turned out, I was overjoyed just to judge on the colored shavings."

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 finished in second place overall and third in oral reasons, out of a total of 16 teams. As results of their top-three finish, the team earned an invitation for a two-week study abroad in Europe in June 2019.

Technology Dairy Cattle Judging Team at World Dairy Expo (from left) Coach Sarah Black, Rebeka McDonald, Gerrit Baker, Kristen Burkhardt, Miriah Dershem, Coach Joe Domecq. (Photo courtesy www.agrigraphics.com.)

Individually, Burkhardt placed sixth overall and third in oral reasons, while Dershem placed seventh overall, each out of 56 total competitors. In the Ayrshire breed class, Dershem placed seventh and Burkhardt eighth, while the team placed second. Both Burkhardt and the team placed second in the Brown Swiss class, while in the Guernsey class, Dershem was fifth and the team was eighth. Dershem took home top honors in the Holstein breed, with Baker placing tenth and the team placing third. The team won the Jersey class while Baker placed fourth and Dershem eighth, and the team was sixth in the Red and White class. Both Dershem and the team placed first in the Milking Shorthorn class, while McDonald was fourth and Burkhardt was sixth.

"As a team, we set a goal of placing third and going to Europe next summer," said Dershem. "I'm proud to say that not only did we exceed that goal, but we made many connections and memories along the way that will last a lifetime."

Also competing from MSU was Makayla Petter, who participated as an individual in the 4-year collegiate division. Petter represented Michigan well, placing eighth overall out of 76 participants. She also placed third in Ayrshire and seventh in Brown Swiss.

"It was an honor and a privilege to judge at the World Dairy Expo Intercollegiate Dairy Judging Competition," said Petter. "Through judging, I have learned self-confidence, public speaking abilities, and quick-thinking skills that I will soon take with me into the work force. I am humbled by this experience and couldn't be more thankful to my coach who has never given up on me!"

Coach Joe Domecq is an academic specialist in the MSU Department of Animal Science and the MSU dairy judging program coordinator.

"It's been an honor working with these youth," said Domecq. "I've worked with some for almost 10 years, from their time as 4-H members to now being my students. What they accomplish in the contest is secondary to seeing what good people they become as they learn responsibility, teamwork, and working hard to reach a goal."

Team travel would not be possible without team fundraising efforts and many sponsors. Major contributions to the state dairy cattle judging program include NorthStar Cooperative, ABS Global, the Michigan Dairy Memorial Scholarship Foundation, the Michigan Holstein Association, the Michigan Jersey Association, the

Michigan Milk Producers Association, Michigan Farm Bureau, and the Michigan Youth Livestock Scholarship Foundation Dairy Fund.