

## MSU Dairy Cattle Judging Team Performs Well in 1st Contest of the Season

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*Updated from an original article written by Melissa Elischer.*

The team placed third overall and fourth in oral reasons out of 11 teams.



Before the dairy cattle judging contest, MSU collegiate team members Kristen Burkhardt, Beka McDonald, Miriah Dershem, and Lynn Olthof check out the local livestock at the Southwestern Exposition Livestock Show and Rodeo in Fort Worth Texas.

EAST LASNING, Mich. Four MSU Agribusiness Management students traveled to the Lone Star State for their first dairy cattle judging contest of the 2020 season. Kristen Burkhardt (Fowlerville), Miriah Dershem (St. Johns), Beka McDonald (Coopersville), and Lynn Olthof (Ferrysburg) spent the weekend in Fort Worth, Texas practicing and competing against other universities at the Southwestern Exposition Livestock Show and Rodeo. The annual contest took place on Sunday January 19th during the Fort Worth Stock Show. Teams of 3-4 students judged ten classes of cattle and gave four sets of oral reasons. Different from other national contests, there were only three breeds judged – Holstein, Jersey, and Brown Swiss.

Before setting foot in the arena, the team had a chance to practice at local dairy farms in Texas. This provided them an opportunity meet local farmers, see how dairy practices may differ across the country, and enjoy some relaxed cow time before the contest. After visiting local farms and seeing some of the sites of Fort Worth, it was time to get down to business on Sunday morning. The team performed well, earning several honors.

The team placed 3rd overall and 4th in oral reasons out of 11 teams. For the breed classes, the MSU team took home 2nd in Holstein, 5th in Brown Swiss, and 9th in Jersey. Olthof was the 5th placed individual overall in the contest.

Dairy judging is not new to Burkhardt, Dershem, McDonald, and Olthof. Burkhardt and Dershem started judging almost a decade ago as 4-H members in Kent and Clinton Counties, respectively. McDonald and Olthof started judging when they first enrolled at MSU in 2017 and quickly learned the art of dairy cattle evaluation and presenting oral reasons. All four students were members of the MSU Institute of Agricultural Technology Dairy

Cattle Judging Team that placed 2nd at World Dairy Expo in 2018. As a result of their excellent performance in Madison, the team was invited to participate in a two week international study program in June 2019, learning about agriculture in Scotland, Ireland, and England. During the trip, they judged at two international contests, met several dairy and beef farmers, and took in the landscape and history of the United Kingdom and Ireland. This unique experience taught the team that farming is farming no matter where in the world food is produced. Management strategies and climate may differ, but agriculture has the same goal across the globe - provide healthy, wholesome food to feed the world.

This is the first of four contests for the 2020 team. The spring and summer will bring more time to practice and refine skills before hitting the road again in the fall for the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (September); World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin (October); and the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky (November).

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