

Academy IV: Five Days, One Message

Mind blowing. Eye-opening. Inspiring.” Superlatives like these were among the glowing reviews given by the 22 members of the fourth class to the Jersey Youth Academy, held July 19 through 24, 2015 in Columbus, Ohio.

With full involvement of the Ohio-based staff of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) and National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ), plus the presidents of both organizations and a roster of outstanding guest speakers, Jersey Youth Academy delivered a comprehensive survey of the Jersey business today, how Jerseys fit the dairy business of tomorrow, and the opportunities for participants to direct their Jersey enthusiasm and personal abilities to advance the Jersey business of the future.

The participants from 13 states included rising seniors in high school through college juniors. They were selected from a national pool of applicants based on merit, motivation and preparation for the program as reflected in their experiences, accomplishments and goal statements.

Academy’s aims—to attract, educate and retain talented young people for careers in the Jersey dairy business—informed a program highlighted by a multitude of presentations, farm visits, hands-on workshops, face-to-face conversations with industry experts and fellowship with peers. The consensus verdict? *“I’d just really like to take my experience home with me to share with others to encourage them to apply and experience what I experienced in just five short days.”*

Keynote Message: “Leave More Than Your Shadow”

The keynote address was given by James Ahlem, past President of National All-Jersey Inc., 2013 recipient of the AJCA Distinguished Service Award and now Chairman of the Board for Hilmar Cheese Company.

Drawing on his personal story, Ahlem related the ups and downs of being a Jersey dairyman in a changing world, citing educa-

tion, cooperation with other members of the dairy community, and knowing one’s goals and abilities as keys to achieving success.

Ahlem’s inspirational story traced a path that began and continues on a family-owned farm. His father was a part of an early All-Jersey® producer-distributor group that for nearly 20 years sold premium Jersey milk products in their own cash-and-carry stores around the San Francisco Bay area. Their success depended on attending to every detail of production and direct sales, and that meant getting the family involved. So not only did he grow up in dairying, Ahlem recalled his experiences promoting Jersey milk, from hauling a cow and calf in a trailer through the city streets to doing product demonstrations and giving balloons to children.

Six years after starting his own Jersey dairy in 1978 with 125 cows and frustrated with low milk prices and being nicked-and-dimed on fees, Ahlem joined with 11 other Jersey breeders in 1984 to create Hilmar Cheese Company. It was their solution to not being paid fairly for the added components in their milk, and a reaction to the advice from a co-op representative he described as the best ever: “If you want more money for your milk, build your own plant.”

The Hilmar group applied its previous experience in vertical integration from the All-Jersey® years to achieve bigger visions and mutually beneficial relationships across the industry. Today, the Hilmar Cheese plants process 25 million pounds of milk a day and export dairy products to 45 different countries, at the same time walking the talk on sustainability.

The nuts-and-bolts of being a Jersey milk producer for that operation means Ahlem continues to focus on genetics, partnerships and management. Explaining why he was a founding member of Jerseyland Sires, he said, “If we’re going to milk Jerseys, we need to milk better Jerseys, so we’re going to need better genetics.” As his dairy operation grew, economies of scale and coping with environmental regulations led

to another partnership that set up a large-scale heifer ranch in Texas. Ahlem also attributed his business success to hiring the right people and “letting them do their job. I remember one time we had a cow sick with milk fever,” he recalled. “I told my herdsman I’d take care of her. He said, ‘No, no, I’ll do it. You stay away.’ That was tough for me to hear, but I learned that if he took ownership, it was a good thing.”

Thirty-seven years later, Ahlem is still planning new avenues for his businesses and continually raising the bar.

He encouraged the Academy class members to dream big. “I think all of you are shooting a little low with your goals,” he said. “With proper involvement, you’ll outgrow expectations. One of you said it was your goal to milk 500 cows. That was my goal. I thought if I got to 500 cows, I’d be in tall cotton and if I was getting 45 lbs. milk that would be wonderful. Today, in partnership with my sons, we milk over 4,000 cows and are getting 70 to 80 lbs. milk out of those cows.”

Ahlem also advised them to see failure as opportunity to learn. Experiences he views as his own personal failures provided chances to learn skills he used in other areas of his life.

He urged Academy participants to “be involved. Serve others. Step out of the comfort zone; socialize with people outside of agriculture. Take appropriate risks. And take responsibility.”

His parting words: “When you leave school, leave more than your shadow.”

The Dean’s Panel and Luncheon

Ahlem joined AJCA President Chris Sorenson and NAJ President David Endres for an open forum including Dean-level supporters of the Academy endowment able to attend this year’s program. This included Tara Bohnert with Alta Genetics; Dr. Ole Meland, the immediate past Chair of the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding, and Brian Barlass of Wisconsin, selected by the World Jersey Cattle Bureau as the North American region winner of the 2014 Jersey Educational Travel Award. Panelists shared insights on their dairy experiences and businesses, with participant questions covering the gamut from internship and employment opportunities, to breeding philosophies and the use and value of genomic evaluations.

During the Dean’s Luncheon, AJCA-
(continued)

The 22 class members of Jersey Youth Academy IV are pictured on the front cover of this issue. Pictured front row, from left: Katlyn Vencill; Logan Courtney, Jenna Preston, Anneke Boer, Liz Perreira, Austin Nauman, and Kal Randall. Middle row, from left: Rebecca Sanders, Nicky Sanders, Megan Hill, Regina Pozzi, Meghan Skiba, Julia Owens, Emily Beebe, Matthew Holton, and Austin Woods. Back row from left: Drew Hill, Toni Jacque, Sammy Allen, Tyler French, Mandy Lagerwey and Blake Koehn.



Jersey Youth Academy gave 22 young Jersey breeders from 13 states many opportunities over their five days in Columbus, Ohio, last July. These photos offer just a small glimpse into the intense week of Jersey Youth Academy. ❖ A visit to Select Sires Inc., in Plain City, allowed the group to see two of the breed-leading sires, All Lynns Louie Valentino-ET (1) and All Lynns Valentino Irwin-ET. ❖ The youth were put through a town hall meeting setting with Stan Erwine of DMI. Each participant was put in the forefront with a question and got to showcase their public speaking skills (2). ❖ The classroom setting gave members the opportunity to mingle with industry leaders (4), such as Roger Cady of Elanco (5). ❖ The youth toured several farms, including Shipley Farms (12), Clover Patch Jerseys (13) and Young's Jersey Dairy (8). ❖ Exercises in linear appraisal (3) and genomic tissue sampling (6) and a mock auction (14) gave them hands-on experience. ❖ Jill Lokai talked with the class at the Select Sires calf campus along with her team of nutritionists and veterinarians (9). ❖ Lifelong friends were made as the youth were able to mingle and meet people their age who shared their same passion (10). ❖ Ole Meland (11) attended a second Jersey Youth Academy as a Dean Panel participant (7). ❖ Social time included a visit to the Columbus Zoo, Zoombezi Bay Waterpark, and catching a Triple A baseball game at Huntington Park between the Columbus Clippers and the Louisville Bats (below).



Jersey Youth Academy

(continued)

NAJ Executive Secretary Neal Smith presented commemorative gifts to Brentwood Farms, Jerseyland Sires and Alta Genetics recognizing their contributions through BW Academy-ET.

As Smith explained, an offer in early 2008 by his breeder, Robert Bignami, to donate a bull calf out of the top JPI cow in the Brentwood herd was the catalyst for creation of Jersey Youth Academy. "I thought that as the breed organization, we should be searching out projects that needed to be done," Bignami recalled. "One of the biggest challenges in our industry is to attract the next generation of managers. We have to compete with many more glamorous occupations for these individuals. Conversely, young people with a passion for the Jersey cow many times are at a loss as to how to translate that interest."

Over a period of several weeks, a continuous brainstorming session emerged, involving a number of different Jersey owners, AJCA elected leadership and association staff. The kernel of the Academy idea—to encourage, guide and train interested young people for careers in management on Jersey dairies and the associated support fields—was born. In short order, the AJCA Board of Directors accepted Bignami's offer of the bull—named BW Academy-ET—and moved to fast-track program development for 2009.

At the 2008 All American Sale, Jerseyland Sires and the Academy Syndicate purchased the bull. By the time he completed his career in the Alta Genetics line-up, he had generated more than \$105,000 for the Academy educational fund. The bull's pedigree also became part of the curriculum for the first three Academy classes, used to illustrate the power of genomic testing for obtaining early and accurate predictions of genetic merit.

Industry Trends, Consumer Concerns

The distinguished roster of invited speakers covered the ever-important topics of industry trends, animal care and welfare, and connecting with consumers.

Dr. Roger Cady, Senior Technical Consultant and Global Sustainability Lead for Elanco, delivered a dose of reality about U.S. dairy and its continuing long-term

trends of more milk from fewer cows in fewer, but larger herds. To shift the frame of reference, he compared milk production in 1995 ("about when you were born") to 2014 statistics for each of their home states, getting them to "think bigger" about milk production, herd size and cow distribution. Cady pointed out that in modern times



Engraved clocks commemorating the financial contributions through BW Academy-ET, donated by Brentwood Farms and syndicated and marketed through Jerseyland Sires and Alta Genetics, were presented by AJCA President Chris Sorenson (left) to Jim Ahlem and Tara Bohnert. The bull's breeder, Bob Bignami, was unable to attend this year's program.

technology, from pasteurization to sexed semen, has been a driver of productivity, but almost always meets opposition.

With bracing candor, stating that "consumers are not sure what we do today is 'farming,'" Dr. Jennifer Walker, Director of Dairy Stewardship at Dean Foods Company, talked about changing perceptions of animal care and welfare. She demonstrated the gulf between producers' views of the relationship with their farm stock and that developed by the larger consuming population. Her advice: We must set the bar high on animal care and welfare, then follow through. "If you say you are doing it, be ready to prove it. Don't make promises you can't keep. Learn from our mistakes and the success/failures of others. Admit when you are wrong, stop making excuses. Treating farm animals well does not make them our pets. It makes us good stewards and good human beings," she concluded.

Vice President Farmer Relations/Activation with Dairy Management Inc., Stan Erwine returned to lead a workshop on communication strategies. Assisted by Erin Williams, communications specialist with American Dairy Association Mideast and a member of the 2011 Academy class, Erwine delivered advice for effectively building consumer confidence in dairy, focusing on values-based statements and strategies for

handling difficult questions. Erwine and Williams also introduced DMI's new Dairy Hub Amplification Center and explained how pre-designed content can be customized and distributed by individual dairy farmers to promote dairy's message.

Jersey Business Up Close, Personal

Hosting the group's tours were Shipley Farms at Newark, Clover Patch Jerseys, Millersburg, and Young's Jersey Dairy, Yellow Springs.

Established in 1941, Shipley Farms is actively managed by three generations of the Phil Shipley family, with granddaughter Stacey Atherton heading up the dairy operations. As a member of the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board, Atherton has been on the front-line of animal welfare issues. She and Dr. Walker focused on dairy stewardship in a walking tour of the operation, plus talked about the pros and cons of operating a mixed-breed milking herd of 400 Holsteins and 85 Registered Jerseys. In contrast, Alan and Sharon Kozak's Clover Patch herd dates only to 1992. They talked about how

they survived a devastating Johne's disease outbreak and their key decisions to build equity and maximize net profit. Calf-raising protocols were discussed at length, with a demonstration of collecting tissue samples for genomic testing.

While at the Kozak dairy, Dr. Joe Hogan of The Ohio State University discussed a wide-range of milk quality and udder health issues with the group. Also, AJCA-NAJ Area Representative Heather Lord gave a cow-side demonstration of the AJCA linear type appraisal program with ample time for the Academy participants to try their hand at evaluating cows using program standards.

At Young's Jersey Dairy, Stuart Young was frank in explaining the ups-and-downs of a farm grounded in the agri-tourism business that also includes farmstead cheesemaking and a full range of food service operations including a sit-down restaurant and catering.

Focus on Genetics

Genetic improvement dominated the second half of the week. Dick Smith, Jersey sire analyst for ABS Global Inc. and the 2014 recipient of the AJCA-NAJ Award for Meritorious Service, joined the Academy class to answer the question, "What does the sire analyst do?" Reflecting on what he has

(continued)

Jersey Youth Academy

(continued)

learned from 30-plus years of experience, he left them with this nugget of wisdom: “To do a good job cutting hay, you’ve got to engage the PTO and to do the best job of breeding Jerseys, you’ve got to engage the PTA.”

At the production facilities of Select Sires Inc., a federation of nine farmer-owned-and-controlled cooperatives, Academy participants got an insider’s look at the growing importance of Jersey genetics in the business plans of U.S. A.I. companies and career opportunities. In addition to a driving tour of the bulls-in-waiting facility and viewing bulls in the collection area, the group saw Select’s “calf campus” for receiving and growing young bulls. Chief Executive Officer David Thorbahn welcomed the group, then turned the program over to eight key staff members who talked about semen collection and processing, bull care and marketing. The visit concluded with a roundtable discussion on applied genomics, including Chuck Sattler, Vice President of Genetic Programs, and Jeff Ziegler, Genomics Program Manager, and AJCA Herd Services Manager Erick Metzger.

AJCA-NAJ Programs and Services

The presentations that kept the program glued together across major program topics were made by AJCA and NAJ department managers. These gave the Academy participants a comprehensive picture of the status of the Jersey breed in the U.S., the vital role of National All-Jersey Inc., and orientations on AJCA’s identification and performance programs, genomic testing and breed-specific tools including Jersey Performance Index™ and JerseyMate™.

The highly anticipated capstone experience of the fourth Academy was a fully staged simulation of a public auction sale conducted by staff of Jersey Marketing Service complete with catalog, auctioneer Todd Woodruff of Urbana, Ohio, and the Jersey Auction Live broadcast. The Academy mock auction captured every aspect of a new buyer’s situation, from the budget being based on the amount the bank would lend to purchase cattle, to comparing and contrasting the merits of each animal based on pedigree, then making wise buying decisions. At the end, syndicates were scored based on price paid compared to expert value assessments and how well they did or did not spend their budget.

“The exercise basically required teams to establish a value for every lot in the catalog and come up with a plan to purchase heifers suited to their goals,” said Academy chaperone Jared Smith, production assistant for Jersey Journal. “Some of

the heifers had obviously strong pedigrees. Some had less ideal pedigrees. Most fell in between. Some syndicates developed strategies to buy just one high-end heifer. Others wanted to buy as many heifers as they could for a good price. Some teams completely crossed off the higher-end animals because they thought they didn’t have the budget, opting for more heifers and a better bang for their buck.

“Teams had to adjust their plans on the fly as the auction was in progress, just as they would have to do in a real auction. Some even needed to change their strategy last minute because one of the heifers had been scratched from the line-up that morning due to health reasons.”

Debates among syndicate members about what they should do went long into the night before the auction, according to chaperone Stephanie Mack of the AJCA Herd Services staff. “It was interesting to see how different things on the pedigree were important to different teams even though all received the same message initially. Some focused on health traits and service information, others on components and JPI.”

“I was encouraged by the sheer number and kinds of questions participants were asking,” she added, “especially when evaluating heifers that had been genotyped against those that had not. It was clear they wanted to learn everything they could about pedigrees to make smart choices with their money.”

Impact Both Immediate, Long-Range

When the Board of Directors authorized creating the Academy program in 2008, they hoped that it would demonstrate the fundamental importance of breed improvement, marketing and promotional programs to the participants.

One who saw how his herd could benefit from the use of AJCA-NAJ services right off was Logan Courtney, Chouteau, Okla.

“I enrolled the herd on REAP, started using JerseyTags and ordered genotyping kits for all the heifers in the hutches.” He is awaiting his first genomic evaluations in December and plans to genotype all females from here on out.

The freshman at Northeastern Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College admits to purchasing his first animals because they “looked nice.” He says he now knows far more about genetic evaluations from the mock auction and is more comfortable making purchases.

“The staff explained how to read each and every single number on a pedigree,” Courtney said. “I knew the basics, like appraisal scores and production, but didn’t know the rest. Now I do. This has been very helpful at sales I’ve attended since.”

Austin Woods, Friendship, Wis., agreed that the mock auction was an especially useful part of Jersey Youth Academy.

“The things we did in the auction helped me make my first Pot O’Gold purchase in November. I studied catalogs for both the Pot O’Gold and the All American and came up with a couple prospects from each. Though some of my choices in the Pot O’Gold sold out of my price range, I was successful bidding on Lot 133, a heifer sired by ‘Nitro’ and going back to Duncan Belle.”

Woods’ experience at the 2015 Pot O’Gold Sale is also illustrative of the guidance from Academy leaders continues well past the program itself. At the sale on November 7 in Louisville, Ky., Stephanie Mack was sitting with him while he was bidding on Lot 133. When the contending bidder carried the high bid of \$4,500 and auctioneer Seth Andrews was asking for \$4,700, Mack knew Woods wanted the heifer and had done his homework, but was nearing his budget limit. She suggested he place a bid for half of what was being asked. His next bid—\$4,600—prevailed and he brought the heifer home.

Woods, who will attend Fox Valley Technical School in January and major in agriculture business, also found the appraisal workshop at Clover Patch Jerseys to be valuable. “I never did dairy judging, so appreciated learning about linear traits and final scores at Academy. I now understand what all the numbers in a linear breakdown mean and how final scores are assigned. My dad and I use this information to make breeding decisions, picking bulls with udder, feet and strength traits that compliment weaknesses of the cow and can improve the resulting calf.”

It isn’t just lessons learned about Jersey pedigrees, type appraisal and such that make Jersey Youth Academy an experience of a lifetime. It also is the opportunity to network with industry leaders, make friends with similar interests and be exposed to a very diverse dairy industry.

“Academy was totally different than other youth convention I’ve attended,” said Katlyn Vencill, Nicholsasville, Ky. “Every part of the program was well planned. There was never a dull, boring moment and always something to do.”

For Vencill, access to a network she can tap into for advice may be the biggest benefit of the program. “A lot of the speakers were available after their presentations, so we had time to visit with them one-on-one and ask questions personally. They all were genuinely interested in knowing and helping all of us.

“We even set up a group message for Youth Academy,” Vencill continued. “We

(continued)

Jersey Youth Academy

(continued)

are in constant contact with one another and learn from each other. When I have a question about anything Jersey, it's the first place I go."

Being introduced to Jersey youth with backgrounds different than their own is something Academy alumni appreciate as well.

"I was very happy with the group we had," said Austin Woods, who applied at the urging of several friends who had attended previous classes. "It wasn't just one or two kids with strong show interests or genetics backgrounds. We had a nice balance of interests."

Added Logan Courtney, "I thought I would be really behind the others and dreaded telling them I milk just 12 cows. But, the experience was great and I didn't feel any less important than anyone else. I also thought it was really cool the way AJCA-NAJ staff worked with all of us. Whether we milk 1,700 cow or five cows, we could take the information and use it on the farm."

Nowhere Else ...

As a unique educational experience, the fourth Academy earned top reviews from its guest speakers.

"Growing up, I could participate in programs like dairy judging and showing, but nothing like this," stated Brian Barlass, who has twice represented the Wisconsin Jersey Breeders' Association on the Dean's Panel. "As an adult, this program is one I would pay to attend to learn more about Jerseys. This speaks about the caliber of the speakers and content of the material presented by the national Jersey organizations.

"Nowhere else will students be exposed to the breadth of Jersey information that is provided in this conference."

"Jersey Youth Academy gives young people opportunity to see what our breed can do for the dairy industry," added AJCA President Chris Sorenson. "They are the ones who will ultimately be responsible for making the breed even more impactful than it is today.

"I was surprised where a lot of the young people already are, in terms of maturity and mindset," he continued. "Many of them are already entrepreneurs, thinking about how to make a living in agriculture or make their farms profitable. They have ideas and concepts that are different than ours and visions that look different than traditional agriculture.

"We Jersey breeders put up the money that funds this program and are excited to see the enthusiasm young people have for Jerseys and the agriculture industry."

Next Class: 2017

In the four classes of Jersey Youth Academy completed to date, 128 different individuals from 32 states have participated. All costs for each individual selected to participate in the program were paid from the Academy's endowment fund.

The Jersey Youth Academy is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt private educational foundation under section 501(c)(3). Initial funding was provided by syndication of BW Academy-ET with major funding coming from the all-donation National Heifer Sale in 2011. In addition to general and memorial contributions received throughout the year, the Cow Pie Bingo fundraiser is held in conjunction with the AJCA-NAJ Annual Meetings.

The fifth Jersey Youth Academy will be held in July of 2017. Applications will be available September 1, 2016, and must be received in the AJCA office by December 1. Applicants must be legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, with the requirement that they will be seniors in high school the fall of 2017 or post-secondary students with at least one year remaining in their degree program at an accredited vocational school, college or university.