

Jersey Youth Academy: “Experience of a Lifetime”

Since 1958, Jersey youth programs have encouraged young people to work with and learn about Registered Jerseys by recognizing their accomplishments through national achievement, production and scholarship awards, The All American Junior Jersey Show, and the Pot O’Gold program. With the Jersey Youth Academy, the scope of that effort has been now been enlarged to include an in-depth educational program focused specifically on the Jersey cow and the Jersey business and that, at the same time, challenges its participants to explore the broad range of career opportunities involving Jerseys and the dairy industry.

Thirteen months and two days after the Board of Directors of the American Jersey Cattle Association approved of the program’s concept, the first class of Jersey Youth Academy arrived in Columbus, Ohio.

The 36 young people from 21 states experienced a Jersey boot camp with as much content as the AJCA-NAJ staff could pack in. Starting with a “Meet the Deans” reception on the evening of July 27, and concluding with exit interviews over lunch four days later, they met more than 40 different dairy and ag industry leaders and educators, toured the offices of the American Jersey Cattle Association and National All-Jersey Inc., got hands-on introductions to key Jersey herd improvement services, learned how they could tell the positive story of the dairy industry to American consumers, and went behind-the-scenes at companies that supply dairy producers as well as market their products.

The consensus opinion of their week? “The experience turned out to be the opportunity of a lifetime.”

As announced in the September 2008 issue of *Jersey Journal*, the Jersey Youth Academy was designed to achieve three broad objectives:

First, for the participants to learn why and how the Jersey breed has grown and prospered, and what the future holds for the Jersey business;

Second, for them to meet leaders from the Jersey community and from across the

support industry, to gain their unique insights about the dairy business with a specific focus on the Jersey cow; and

Third, to learn about the range of career opportunities that involve the Jersey breed and Jersey products, and begin the journey that will take them to success working in the Jersey dairy business.

All costs, including transportation to Columbus, were paid by the Academy. This fund was created a year ago in June, with the primary source of contributions coming from the sale of BW Academy–ET in the 2008 All American Jersey Sale. The fund has recently received 501(c)(3) status from the IRS.

Why They Wanted To Attend

The 36 participants in the first Jersey Youth Academy (*see next page*) were

chosen from a national pool of applicants earlier this spring. Applications were reviewed by a committee appointed by AJCA President David Chamberlain and chaired by AJCA Director James Quist. Selection was based on merit, motivation and preparation for the program as reflected in the written application and goal statement submitted by the applicants.

The answers to the final question on the application, “Why do you want to participate in Jersey Youth Academy?” were as varied as the individuals, their backgrounds and ambitions, and where they were in their formal schooling.

Still, common themes emerged. Predominant was the desire to know more about the unique characteristics and needs of the Jersey cow.

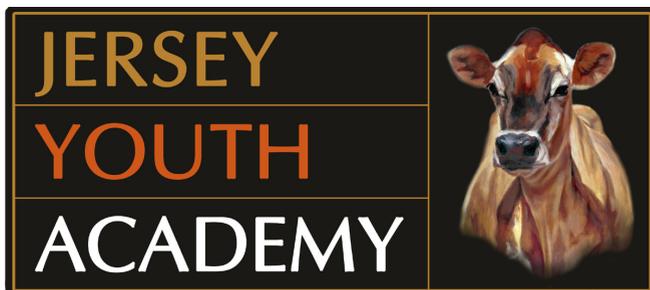
“While I thoroughly enjoy my animal science classes,” wrote Amy Maxwell, a sophomore majoring in ag business at Iowa State University, “I would particularly appreciate learning specifically about Jerseys instead of all dairy animals in general. Specific study of the Jersey industry would help me to be better prepared to return to the farm when I graduate from college.

“The days spent at the Jersey Youth Academy will be an excellent chance for me to broaden my knowledge of the Jersey industry and to see what lies in the future of the industry,” she concluded.

Putting Jersey-specific knowledge to use to promoting the breed was also an important goal of many applicants.

“I want to learn as much as I can to try and promote the Jersey cow and to give my peers an insight to the true greatness of Jerseys,” said Karessa Mann, of Turlock, Calif., who attends Modesto Junior College. “I want to participate not only because I will get a lot out of this academy, but because I can contribute a lot to it as well.”

“The Jersey breed is vital to the success of the dairy industry,” wrote high school junior Kelsey Burnham of Okeechobee, Fla. “However, not enough people in my community and state understand how important the Jersey is. The dairy industry is going through a very rough economic time. I want to become part of the solution and help make the dairy and Jersey industry



better for future generations.”

The opportunity to meet and learn from industry leaders as well as form new peer relationships was an important opportunity cited by Derek Dreier, a Minnesota resident attending the University of Wisconsin–River Falls.

“The Jersey Youth Academy seems like a new and innovative way in which I can learn more about the Jersey cow that I have come to appreciate so much. Being able to speak and connect with others my age as well as established, influential leaders in the breed would be helpful for my future.

“I would really love to see the national headquarters for Jersey and meet the people that make our association one of the finest,” Dreier added. “I think brainstorming with industry professionals and other youth could unlock ideas to bring back home to the farm. I really plan on being a successful dairyman and any opportunity to help me gain that success is something I want to be a part of.”

“I see it as one of those opportunities that I don’t want to see pass by me,” wrote Julie Orth, a freshman in ag education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. “When my parents returned from South Dakota (in 2007) after attending their first national Jersey convention, I was intrigued with the way they talked about the wonderful people, the great cows and their new experiences. I hope I will be as excited and motivated by participating in the Jersey Youth Academy.”

Then there was this answer from Brad Barham, a senior in business management and finance at Tennessee Wesleyan College. He

wrote: “I have been looking for this opportunity for years! It would overjoy me to be able to meet a lot more people in the



THE FIRST ACADEMY CLASS

Some of the names in this first class of Jersey Youth Academy will be familiar to *Jersey Journal* readers because of their recognition in the AJCA achievement and/or production contests, or through The All American Junior Jersey Show. Others are not so familiar, demonstrating the broad appeal of the Academy’s aim and program for Jersey youth in high school and college.

Row 1, from left to right: Cassandra Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y.; Danielle Brown, Dodgeville, Wis.; Avery Lutz, Mocksville, N.C.; Julie Orth, Lancaster, Wis.; Karessa Mann, Turlock, Calif.; and Ivy Roberts, Mount Berry, Ga.; *Row 2:* Kristin Hogan, Tillamook, Ore.; Stephanie Kasper, Owatonna, Minn.; Jennifer Hansen, Canby, Ore.; Kortney Hoerbert, Delavan, Ill.; Lena Sweeney, Visalia, Calif.; and Lauren Brittany Core, Salvisa, Ky.; *Row 3:* Abby Tauchen, Bonduel, Wis.; Kelsey Burnham, Okeechobee, Fla.; Rachel Rawn, Charles Town, W. Va.; Amy Maxwell, Donahue, Iowa; Elena Ooms, Valatie, N.Y.; Dorothea Baker, Wyoming, N.Y.; Rene Boardman, Sheffield, Mass.; *Row 4:* Claire Stanley, East Fairfield, Vt.; Amber Ettinger, Kinards, S.C.; Katherine Rashall, Ida, La.; Zachary Mason, North Stratford, N.H.; Sadie Green, Elsie, Mich.; and Jonathan Holewinski, Cecil, Wis.; *Row 5:* Londa Johnson, LaCrescent, Minn.; Natalie Sanders, Hilmar, Calif.; Wade Kessenich, DeForest, Wis.; Brad Barham, Calhoun, Tenn.; and Kyle Schirm, West Salem, Ohio; *Top row:* Colin Russell, Hilmar, Calif.; Clark Egleston, Fultonville, N.Y.; Daniel Fugate, Whitesburg, Tenn.; Derek Dreier, Norwood Young America, Minn.; Tyler Boyd, Parrottsville, Tenn., and Ted Christoph, Fallon, Nev.

Jersey breed and see their views on the industry and where they want the Jersey cow to go.

“There’s no question in my mind that the Jersey cow has played a major role in my success as a dairyman and as a processor. I want you to keep one thing in mind. All milk is not the same. If you keep in mind that all milk is not the same, you’ll learn a lot and it’ll take you a long way in your dairy life.”

*Keynote speaker Richard Clauss
Chairman of the Board, Hilmar Cheese Company*

“I have always been told that the future is now,” he continued. “For me, that is becoming more and more true as each day

passes. I am one short year from being in the job market, and I really want to know what I can do with the Jersey cattle industry. Meeting other Jersey breeders can give me a better perspective on where my life needs to go in order to meet my ambitions.”

Sage Advice Set The Tone

During the exit interviews, Academy participants repeatedly identified the special value to them from exposure to industry leaders. At the top of their list were the keynote speaker, Richard Clauss of Hilmar, Calif., and major donor Robert Bignami, of Brentwood Farms, Orland, Calif. Their comments at the opening reception set the tone for the program.

“The Jersey cow has played a major role in my life,” Clauss, a past-president of both the AJCA and NAJ, said. “My first Grade A, Class I fluid market was with the All-Jersey® program. My wife was raised on a Jersey dairy and raised on Jersey milk right out of the tank. The Genetic Recovery program allowed me to develop a registered Jersey herd. That has contributed bulls to A.I. and that herd is worth more money to me today because it is registered. Research funded by National

All-Jersey Inc. and the Equity program provided information and confidence to myself and other Jersey dairymen to build

cheese plants in California. One of those cheese plants that I’m more familiar with is Hilmar Cheese, and it’s become the largest single-site cheese plant in the world today.”

In recounting the details, Clauss pointed out that it was a “working group of Jersey dairymen” who formed

Jerseyland Sires (now the sole provider of Jersey semen for Alta Genetics) in 1978,

(continued to page 20)

(continued from page 19)

encouraged by then-AJCA Executive Secretary J.F. Cavanaugh.

“This working group was the start of a much larger venture,” he continued. “In 1983, knowing that Jersey milk would yield 30% more Cheddar cheese, some California dairymen began following the examples of some dairies back east. We followed Bob Bignami’s lead and opened up Hilmar Cheese in 1985. We started that plant with 15 Jersey dairies and 200,000 lbs. milk. Today that plant has grown to where we have 225 dairies and we process between 12 and 13 million lbs. milk daily.”

Summing up, “There’s no question in my mind that the Jersey cow has played a major role in my success as a dairyman and as a processor.”

In his comments, Robert Bignami recounted the concerns that led to the fundraising effort called Project Academy.

“As we grow, there is the increasing difficulty of finding management that can utilize modern methods and genetics and have a love of Jerseys. The basis of Academy was developed with a mission to find young people with an interest in Jerseys, and help mentor them to success within the Jersey industry—and in doing so, assist them achieve their goals in life and contribute to the evolution of our Jersey industry.”

Citing the “faster and faster” progress in genomic testing, Bignami observed that “this is really an exciting time.”

“Up until now, most of us who are commercial dairymen would agree that management has probably been the single biggest thing that’s increased production. Genetics has helped, but learning how to feed a cow, learning how to take care of it has probably had a bigger impact on production than genetics even though you have to have genetics to get production. Now with the genome, deciphering it and with the innovations coming from it, you’ll be a part of this new part of the dairy industry.”

Also participating in the Dean’s program July 27 and 28 were AJCA President David Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y.; current Chair of the National Dairy Board, Kimberly Clauss, Hilmar, Calif.; and Paul Chittenden, past-president of the AJCA from Schodack Landing, N.Y. Tara Bohnert represented major contributor Alta

Genetics. Two state Jersey organizations supporting at the Dean level were also represented: Vermont by Tim Angell, Randolph Center; and Pennsylvania by Dr. Susan Wicker, Centre Hall. They talked about goals setting, education, and internship opportunities.

Learning To “Tell Your Story” and Much More

A significant portion of the Academy schedule was devoted to communication training, specifically portions of the “Telling Your Story” program created by Dairy Management Inc. Stan Erwine, Vice President, Producer Relations, facilitated

“With interest and passion, you can achieve your objective and Project Academy can be your pathway to the success you seek. Enjoy your time here. You will see and hear from the many aspects of our Jersey industry. And while milking Jersey cows may be our base, there is a lot more to the Jersey business than the milking parlor!”

From comments by Robert Bignami during “Meet the Deans” reception

two sessions on different days. His presentations created greater awareness of the numerous opportunities that exist to provide a positive image of the dairy industry to consumers, as well as the key messages that they respond to.

Additional highlights included a tour and small-group sessions at the AJCA-NAJ headquarters, concluding with a panel of past national Jersey youth program winners talking about their experiences and how these led to their current professional careers; tours to Clover Patch Jerseys in Millersburg, Ohio; Smith Dairy, Orrville; and Young’s Jersey Dairy, Yellow Springs. The list of presenters also included Dr. Thomas Earleywine, Land O’Lakes Animal Milk Products Co., on Jersey calf raising; Dr. Valente Alvarez, Director of the Food Industries Center at Ohio State, on cheese making techniques; Dr. Francis Fluharty, Ohio State, on marketing trends; and Dr. Henry Zerby, on characteristics of Jersey beef.

When It Was All Over ...

the verdict from participants was that the inaugural Jersey Youth Academy exceeded their expectations.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the selection of exemplary speakers in the program as well as the recreation, mini-projects and interacting with a group of peers whose lives, like mine, similarly had been

impacted by the Jersey breed,” wrote Zachary Mason, from North Stratford, N.H., and a student at Cornell University. “I plan to keep in contact with many of the superb youth I met during the Academy as well as to grow my network starting with many of the magnificent speakers we were introduced to.

“Thanks for putting together one of the most influential dairy events I have attended.”

“The week of the first Jersey Youth Academy was one of the best weeks of my life,” Kelsey Burnham from Florida wrote. “Up until the Academy, I was not sure that my career would be in agriculture. But, now

I know that I belong in agriculture and with Jerseys. It is now no longer a dream, but a goal of mine to make south Florida a leader in the Jersey industry.”

Sponsors and presenters have received letters, too, like this one from Claire Stanley of

East Fairfield, Vt., to Bob Bignami and his wife Pam.

“Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to be at the Academy and share with us your knowledge of the Jersey breed and the dairy industry. We were referred to as the future, but we wouldn’t have the opportunities we have without what you have done in the past and are doing in the present. Thank you for your contribution toward establishing this program.”

Parents of participants have also written to members of the Dean group and AJCA staff about the impact of Academy. Almost two months later, Terry Hoerbert, Delavan, Ill., reported that her daughter Kortney “still talks about topics and happenings from the week-long ‘vacation’! AWESOME doesn’t come close to describing the experience!”

The comments of Joy Rawn, Charles Town, W.Va., provide a fitting summary.

Daughter Rachel “has always enjoyed her participation in the All American Junior Jersey Show, but the Jersey Youth Academy provided a unique environment for her to meet and dialog with other young people with similar interests from across the country. The dairy industry will continue to be dynamic and challenging. Thank you for giving the next generation the ‘big picture in full color’ to help them achieve success in whatever path they pursue.”