

UW-River Falls' Dairy Judging Team takes top honors at World Dairy Expo

October 2, 2018 - The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Dairy Judging Team captured top honors October 1 at the National Intercollegiate Dairy Judging Contest at World Dairy Expo in Madison. The team took first place overall and first team in reasons. UW-River Falls hasn't won the national title in more than two decades.

Leading the UW-River Falls team to victory over the 21 participating schools was Erica Helmer, of Plymouth, with her third-place individual finish overall. Teammate Kaila Wussow Tauchen, of Cecil, finished ninth overall. Matthew Kramer, of St. Cloud, Minn., and Clint Irrthum, of Wanamingo, Minn., round out the winning team for UW-River Falls. Steve Kelm, professor of dairy science, and Mary Holle, a 2012 graduate of UW-River Falls, coached the team.

"I am so proud of the team we have become and all of our accomplishments," said Helmer. "My teammates have become some of my closest friends. Considering all my years of judging and experience, there couldn't have been a better way to end it."

"Winning at Dairy Expo is something I thought I could only dream about when I was younger," said Kramer. "I am thankful for Dr. Kelm and Mary Holle for all of their time preparing us for this contest."

Tauchen, too, thought back to her youth.

"Dairy judging ... is a passion we've been chasing since a very young age. To have so many people [coaches and families] dedicated to helping us pursue this dream is truly humbling," she said.

Irrthum has been in the spotlight before. He was a member of the Minnesota 4-H team that took top honors in the National 4-H Dairy Judging Contest at Expo two years ago.

"They were both extremely fun and both were really close margins. I guess I've just been lucky to be part of two really great teams!" he said.

Kelm summed up his reaction to the top finish and reflected on his many years of coaching teams.

“What an absolute thrill to hear UW-River Falls announced as the contest winner!” Kelm said. “I have had the honor to work with so many great students over the years. It is a real honor to work with this year's group of seniors, good judges and even better people.”

In a remarkable coincidence, emeritus Professor Perry Clark was on hand for the award presentation as he was accompanying a group of students from AERES University (Netherlands) who were in the U.S. as part of an exchange agreement with UW-River Falls. Clark was the coach of the 1995 UWRF Dairy Judging Team, the last UWRF team to take top honors at World Dairy Expo. He spent time Tuesday at the 2018 Expo tracking down the four team members from 1995. He successfully reconnected with all four, each was working or showing cattle at the show. The 1995 team consisted of Jenny Berg, Reid Stransky, Kelli Tuman and Rebecca Walker.

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Photo: The UW-River Falls Dairy Judging Team captured top honors at the National Intercollegiate Dairy Judging Contest October 1 at the World Dairy Expo in Madison. L-R: Matthew Kramer, Erica Helmer, Professor/coach Steve Kelm, Kaila Wussow Tauchen, and Clint Irrthum.