

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## Overview

The Dairy Associates Program is an educational program for junior- and senior-level students at Michigan State University (MSU). The program prepares students for future careers in the dairy industry by combining classroom instruction with experiential learning in an industry setting. The Dairy Associates Program was established in 1999 with monetary gifts from dairy industry leaders. The MSU Dairy Challenge, a key piece of the Dairy Associates Program, was initiated in 2000 as a practical hands-on experience that allows students to apply what they have learned to a real-world dairy operation while working as part of a team. To date, more than 500 students have participated in the program.

Dairy Associates work and interact with dairy producers and industry professionals, including program alumni. Students visit and analyze progressive dairy farms to identify successful practices used on working dairy farms and meet with the industry professionals who provide services to the producers. In addition, students attend dairy industry conferences to hear perspectives on current issues from industry leaders. Beginning in their freshman year, students interested in the Dairy Associates program are encouraged to participate in the MSU Dairy Challenge to help prepare them for their future coursework and careers.

Dr. G.C. and Gwendolyn Graf contributed the initial endowment for establishing the Dairy Associates Program. Dr. Graf grew up on a dairy farm in Stockbridge, Mich., and graduated from MSU (B.S., Agriculture) in 1934. He dedicated his professional life to serving the dairy industry in a variety of ways. Dr. Graf's wish is to ensure that tomorrow's dairy industry leaders have access to a higher education program integrating coursework with extracurricular and experience-based learning opportunities.

Additional opportunities are provided through contributions from partnering individuals and organizations in the Michigan dairy industry, the G.C. and Gwendolyn Graf Memorial Student Enhancement Program, the Frederick Pierce Halbert Dairy Memorial Endowed Scholarship Fund, the Roger and Marjorie Mellenberger Dairy Associates Program Enhancement Fund, and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Department of Animal Science at MSU.

## The Program

In their first year at MSU, students interested in the Dairy Associates Program are strongly encouraged to participate in the MSU Dairy Challenge to increase their awareness of knowledge and skills they'll need for various careers in the dairy industry. Participants can earn the opportunity to participate in the Midwest



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Regional Dairy Challenge or in the North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge later in their college career.

An introductory dairy management courses encourages students to develop a resume and complete a job shadowing experience with an industry professional to establish contacts in the industry and prepare for an internship during their junior year. Though internships are not required, students are strongly encouraged to complete one because it serves as a valuable step in preparing for their career. Dairy faculty members help students identify potential internships to match their skills and interests.

As juniors and seniors, students take additional dairy management courses and complete personality assessments to help determine their career direction. Students can also enroll in additional courses focusing on dairy herd or farm business management or engage in undergraduate research projects.

### **Activities**

Dairy Associates are encouraged to attend dairy industry conferences during their undergraduate career. Examples of conferences include the Tri-State Dairy Nutrition Conference, the Western Dairy Management Conference, and the American Dairy Science Association (ADSA). Attending a dairy industry conference increases student awareness of current issues in the dairy industry and practical aspects of dairy management, and facilitates networking with industry professionals.

International experiences are encouraged for Dairy Associates. The study abroad program to the Netherlands and Belgium that focuses on Dairy Husbandry and Environmental Stewardship, for example, provides exposure to dairy farming practices in other countries.

Dairy Associates with an interest in research can complete an undergraduate research project. Students are encouraged to investigate opportunities with potential faculty advisors during their junior year. Faculty advisors are instrumental in developing project proposals. Dairy Associates report the results of their projects annually at the Department of Animal Science spring symposium. They are also encouraged to present their research results at other research symposia and submit the work for publication.

Funding support is provided to offset research and travel expenses. Additionally, scholarship support is available to all students with an interest in a dairy industry career through the [Michigan Dairy Memorial and Scholarship Foundation](#).

**How to Apply**

Students with a sincere interest in a career in the dairy industry are encouraged to apply to the Michigan Dairy Memorial and Scholarship Foundation. Completing the Dairy Associates Program will provide students with comprehensive training in dairy management to prepare them for a variety of dairy industry careers.

Students can participate in the MSU Dairy Challenge during fall semester of their first year at MSU. Course options include dairy farm management, applied nutrition and reproduction, health, farm business management and nutrient management. Although faculty advisers can provide recommendations, there is not a specific sequence for completing the required dairy-related courses.

Students interested in learning more about the Dairy Associates Program and related opportunities are invited to contact Dr. Miriam Weber Nielsen, coordinator of the program:

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