

Dairy Judging: What you should know¹

Bonnie Ayars²

Program Specialist

Department of Animal Sciences

The Ohio State University

About 9:30 p.m. on Labor Day, 16 4-H and OSU collegiate judges and their coaches drove into the Waterman Dairy at OSU. Dairy judging “boot camp” had officially ended. Everyone scrambled to locate their luggage and find their vehicles or parents to head home. Some had another 2-3 hour drive and all would have little time to rest before school or jobs on Tuesday morning.

Our journey had begun on the previous Friday as we headed to the Maryland State Fair. It was an intense practice that included evaluating 28 classes and presenting countless set of “reasons” in the accepted format WITH confident delivery. Some of these were even taped! Even though the days were busy, we still found time to learn more about each other and have some fun.

Often, I am asked how you try out for the 4-H and/or college team. This column provides me an excellent opportunity to explain the process and a few other important facts.

4-Hers who have dairy projects are often introduced to dairy judging through their parents and their past experiences or a county coach. Some also spend time developing this skill in FFA career development events. Local, district and state dairy judging contests and clinics at the Ohio State Fair help to sort out those with the interest, skill, and desire to pursue the goal. It takes time and a sincere commitment! More than this, it requires a passion to accept the challenge.

In nearly all states, there is a separate coach for 4-H and collegiate teams. But in Ohio, yours truly coaches both. Valued and respected volunteers who assist me are Bernie Heisner (COBA CEO), Kelly Epperly (alumni of both teams and Semex Mating Specialist), plus my loyal husband, John. Both Bernie and John are former high individuals from the Intercollegiate Contest of a few years ago. Their expertise is invaluable! However, each of us brings a different twist to the learning process that enables us to reach out to different kinds of leaning styles! During any given year, countless numbers of county coaches, parents, dairy farms, exhibitors at shows, and financial contributors ALL add their support. It takes everyone working together to sustain and BUILD a dairy judging program.

¹ ©Bonnie Ayars, The Ohio State University. Published in Buckeye Dairy News, 2008-10(5).

² Contact: ayars.5@osu.edu

After those interested are sorted out and contacted, a variety of judging workouts take place in the summer and the Ohio State Fair. From all of this, two teams are selected based on their age, scores, and ability to commit. The primary 4-H team judges at the Pennsylvania All American and the National Contest at World Dairy Expo. The secondary team understudies and judges at the North American Livestock Show in Louisville and hopefully moves on to the primary team in the following year.

For the collegiate team, many of those same 4-Hers attend Ohio State and enroll in the Animal Science 207, Dairy Evaluation course. Others may take the class as they are pre-vet majors, and others yet may come from other species as an Animal Science major. This class is the foundation for building OSU's team. They may come from all kinds of backgrounds, but the same mix of commitment and passion build a genuine interest in dairy judging.

Becoming involved with dairy judging is SO MUCH MORE than just judging cows. 4-H and collegiate judges gain life skills by learning to be more observant, to think logically, to make decisions based on priorities, and then how to defend the choices by the oral reasons they present. They literally learn a new language as they use terms to define dairy character, udder traits, frame and form. Then they develop phrases between the comparisons of the pairs of cattle in a class of four. There is an opening, a closing, and the goal to be factual as they confidently deliver their logic. As far as future careers, companies pay extra for youth who have developed such skills. Employers search out these experiences on resumes. Anyone reading this column is aware of how important verbal communication skills are in today's societies...not just in career productivity, but also in relationship skills! Dairy judging teaches all of this!

As the primary coach, I have learned that more lies within these aspiring judges than they ever realized! When I can encourage them to unlock this magic, the results are the true rewards of this position. It is a journey of hundreds of miles and the memories last a lifetime. The kids tell and retell their stories and adventures. They are introduced to the concept of networking with each other and the industry. As I write this, the season is just beginning, but each time I jump into the van or when we view yet another class, I will not "fail to recognize" that this is a priceless opportunity!



**For more information on dairy judging programs,
contact : ayars.5@osu.edu**