

# Texas Dairy Matters

*Higher Education Supporting the Industry*



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## **Youth Programs: Sparking an interest in dairy careers**

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Workforce shortage is one of the main challenges the dairy industry has faced for decades. As we begin 2021, we are taking a look at the generational changes of dairy farm employees and how to spark interest in this new generation of youth to pursue a career in the dairy industry. The newest generation, Generation Z, is defined as individuals born from 1997 to 2012<sup>1</sup>. This generation was born into technology and social media, and it is an active part of their lives. This article will discuss the learning behaviors of Generation Z and the Extension programs that are encouraging this generation to pursue a career in the dairy industry.

### **Learning Behaviors**

There are many differences in Generation Z's personality and learning behaviors, and it is important to acknowledge these differences and potentially adopt management techniques to make the most of this generation as dairy employees. For example, Generation Z is technologically skilled, which could benefit the dairy industry as precision technologies and computer programs continue to advance and become more relevant on dairy operations. The Generation Z population does prefer detailed directions and examples to follow<sup>2</sup>; therefore, this group will be more successful when shown how to do something and developing hands-on experience. This generation prefers methods of communication that involve technology, which differs from Baby Boomers and other generations. However, they also have a desire to impress their employer and be successful in their job<sup>2</sup>. Providing educational programs and internship opportunities can help Generation Z learn and understand the dairy industry. This could help spark an interest in the job opportunities available on a dairy farm and in the dairy industry, helping to provide future employees and dairy advocates.

## Programs Promoting Dairy Jobs to Youth

Since 2019, Texas and New Mexico dairy farmers, allied industry professionals and Extension dairy specialists have developed a hands-on dairy program for high school junior and senior students to promote on-farm jobs and other jobs within the dairy industry. There are currently two programs in the state of Texas, the Dairy Honors Program in the High Plains, and the Junior Dairy Consortium in Erath, Hamilton, and Comanche counties. During these programs, the students learn about the different areas of a dairy operation including milking, reproduction, herd health, nutrition, maternity, and technologies. Each topic features a dairy faculty, allied industry professional, or dairy farmer to discuss the daily routines and the job opportunities available. Students are then given an opportunity for hands-on activities such as palpating a dystocia simulator, conducting a California Mastitis Test, and identifying feedstuffs.



Figure 1. Pictures from the Dairy Honors Program. The program consist of two field days with oral presentations and hands-on activities regarding cow's nutrition and reproduction, newborn and calfhood management, facility design and maintenance, and udder health and milk quality.

## Results from Extension Programs

In the past two years there have been two Dairy Honors Programs (2019 and 2020 DHP; Fig. 1) and one Junior Dairy Consortium (2020 JDC; Fig. 2 shows the logo). Following the programs, students fill out an evaluation to assess the programs' success. In the evaluations, all students said they would recommend the programs to their peers and enjoyed the hands-on activities.

In surveys from Dairy Honors Program in the Texas Panhandle (i.e., 2019 and 2020 DHP), over 95% students rated the overall experience as excellent, and over 85% rated instructors and topics covered as excellent. When students where asked what they would

change about the program, they said they wanted more hands-on activities. On the other hand, surveys from Junior Dairy Consortium in central Texas (i.e., 2020 JDC) showed that 90% of students increased their knowledge about the impact of the dairy industry, and 85% of students increased their knowledge about job opportunities available in the dairy industry. These results indicate that participants enjoyed and would recommend these programs, and that we were successful in educating students about the impacts and opportunities that exist in the dairy industry.



Figure 2. Logo for the Junior Dairy Consortium in Erath, Comanche, and Hamilton Counties.

Beyond student evaluations, the high school agriculture teachers have thought very highly of the programs and believe that they are important for their students' education. Due to the success of these programs, county agents have been contacted about company sponsorship for future programs and research grants are being applied for.

## Conclusion

Providing more programs and tracking students who pursue a career in the dairy industry can provide insight on how successful these programs are in providing the dairy industry with future employees. Currently planned for 2021 are two Dairy Honors Programs, one in the spring and one in the fall, and one Junior Dairy Consortium in the fall. For more information on the Dairy Honors Program and Junior Dairy Consortium, please reach out to your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service county agent or the AgriLife Extension dairy specialists Drs. Juan Piñeiro and Jennifer Spencer.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Dimock, M. 2019. Defining Generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. Pew Research Center. Accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

<sup>2</sup>Nicholas, A. J. 2020. Preferred Learning Methods of Generation Z. Available at [https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac\\_staff\\_pub/74/](https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/fac_staff_pub/74/).

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