Members of the Dairy Science Club spend the school year preparing for the Dairy Challenge. The North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge gives students across North America an opportunity to apply the things they learn in the classroom to a real dairy farm, by evaluating the dairy’s performance and presenting suggestions. At the recent Western regional contest, Utah State was represented on each of the three first-place teams.

The Western region includes universities from California across to Texas and up to Alberta, Canada. This year, Utah State University hosted the event in Ogden, Utah. Students were divided into aggregate teams of four or five members. According to club president Joe Coles, the Dairy Challenge puts students’ knowledge to the test. Teams evaluated an operating dairy farm on the basis of facilities, nutrition, financials, reproduction and animal health to identify opportunities for improvement. Each team then presented both their observations and correlating recommendations to a panel of judges. Teams were ranked on how well their assessment of the dairy aligned with that of the judges. USU students Jerod Berrett, Kailey Foster and Osvaldo Gonzalez each found themselves on one of the first-place teams.

Each of these students shared that the mixed-university teams provided a great learning opportunity. Working with students from other areas provided different perspectives on the dairy industry. These teams also provided the challenge of learning to work with new individuals with whose opinions you may not always completely agree. Foster, a sophomore, said she was slightly intimidated by the others in her group, who were all seniors preparing to begin careers. In the end, she was able to learn a lot from her teammates and had a good experience.

The club’s experience at regionals also provided a springboard for growth. As most of USU’s club members were competing for the first time this year, they learned many things after having experienced the contest for themselves. Club members took note of topics that they would like to learn more about throughout the event, which will help guide the club in preparation for the national event coming up at the end of March. The club will also be working with local dairymen who have agreed to hold practice sessions at their dairies. This will allow students to gain more hands-on experience in assessing a dairy farm in person, instead of just talking about it in a classroom setting, and then presenting that analysis.

The national event includes two components: contest and Academy. Each participating college can bring a team of four students to represent their school in the Dairy Challenge contest. These students work as a team to conduct and present an analysis of the selected dairy farm. Members of the first-place teams receive a scholarship reward. Academy participants take part in an event that is structured similarly to the regional event, with aggregate teams of eight or nine individuals. Although participants still take part in the analysis and presentation, the Dairy Challenge Academy is focused on educating students on how to evaluate and consult on a dairy farm through a first-hand experience.

Dairy Science Club members invite all students to join the club and get involved. Club meetings offer a fun environment for everyone to learn more about the dairy industry. You don’t have to be studying Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences, be in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences or have a background in the dairy industry to be part of the club. It’s open to any student on campus who has a desire to learn. Coles stated, “As we have more perspectives and more questions, we can better develop as a team and deepen our understanding of the dairy industry.”

To learn more and see what’s going on, find the Dairy Science Club on Facebook and Instagram.