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The Dairy Industry “Spelled Out”

The Real Faces of Dairy Essay Contest

May 28, 2016

Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm he had a...dairy cow! E-I-E-I-O! Production agriculture has come a long way since Old MacDonald had his farm. Many farms today are much more specialized and raise only a select species of livestock. My family has been raising and milking Holstein cattle for over 100 years. Raising and showing dairy cattle teaches me something new nearly every day. By using the letters in the word dairy, I am going to explain a skill that I have learned through my Dairy Production Supervised Agriculture Experience while being a member of the National FFA Organization.

“D” stands for dependence. My cows depend on me every day for their basic needs which include feeding, providing fresh water, bedding, health needs, and of course being milked twice a day, every single day of the year. Not only do my Holsteins depend on me daily, I depend on them to produce milk to sell. So, you might say it is a “give and take” relationship when it comes to dairy farming.

The letter A stands for the appreciation of agriculture. Boy, do I appreciate the dairy products that are in the stores today because I know just how much time and effort goes into caring for, raising, and milking dairy cows. I make others aware of just where that gallon of milk or that cheese on their pizza comes from by allowing them to visit our farm, bringing a dairy calf to school for Food for America, and using the topic of dairy farming in school assignments. The more I share, the more I hope others appreciate the work that dairy farmers do for the people of our community and our world.

“I” stands for industry. The dairy industry covers a wide range of careers. There are those who develop quality feed and hay for increased milk production, people who are involved in the transportation and processing of milk, plus individuals who inspect and promote dairy products. Seeing all of the opportunities the dairy industry provides, you would think that dairies would be

everywhere, but in reality the number of dairy farms has decreased dramatically in the past decade. Of the half dozen dairy farms once grazing the pastures nearby, our family farm is the last remaining Grade A Dairy operation in Linn County. With active industry promotion, I hope this trend will soon change.

“R” stands for responsibility. I, myself, own twenty cows in the family herd, and also have several heifer and bull calves that I am responsible for. It is my responsibility to carry out my daily chores to ensure that our operation runs smoothly and efficiently. I must ensure that the calves are fed milk replacer as well as assisting in the milking parlor cleaning udders and operating the surge milkers with my dad and uncle. I also show my dairy cattle at local and area cattle shows. Showing is a huge responsibility that not only helps build my confidence and discipline, but allows me to see how other operations work; showing me new methods that I can take back to my own family farm.

Lastly, the letter Y stands for years of experience. I come from a long line of dairy farmers that trace back to my great-great grandfather who owned a dairy farm in Michigan during the early 1900’s. I value the knowledge and lessons that my grandfather, uncle, and dad have taught me while working with them side-by-side on our dairy farm.

Dependability, the appreciation of agriculture, industry knowledge, responsibility, and years of experience are only a small part of what the dairy industry provides. In spite of the challenges that dairy farmers are currently fighting, I am thankful for the life lessons it has taught me and greatly value its place in society today. While I may not end up like Old MacDonald with countless farm animals, I am confident that I will continue to be engaged in the dairy industry and promote it to the very best of my ability for the rest of my life.

Essay Word Count: 680 Words