

Student's 'Amazing Experience' is the PDPW Mentor Program

Successful transition to the next generation of qualified and enthusiastic dairy producers is essential to sustaining the dairy industry. The 2013 Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW) Dairy Mentor program helped a record 55 students bridge that gap, connecting students with experienced dairy producers to share real world lessons on-farm through an ongoing mentoring relationship.

That connection meant so much to Jennifer Raboine, a UW-Platteville student and aspiring veterinarian. "The Mentor Program was one of the best opportunities that I have had while at college. It was an amazing experience," Jennifer says.

That amazing experience might never have happened. Jennifer's dad ran her grandparents' dairy farm when she was young, but the farm was sold before she went to high school. "I honestly put the farm out of my head for the next few years. In high school, I wanted to be a marine biologist. I ended up at UW-La Crosse. Around this time I began helping out at my neighbor's dairy farm and realized how much I missed it."

Jennifer transferred to UW-Platteville, and picked up three jobs on dairy farms. She is on track to graduate with a degree in Biology and Animal Science with an emphasis in Dairy Science. It was her involvement with the UW-Platteville Dairy Club that propelled Jennifer into the PDPW Mentor program, where she gained her "amazing experience."

Jennifer visited Ryan and Krista Dolan's farm in January and learned about their milking parlor and milking system. She asked questions about protocols and challenges the Dolans faced. She also got the opportunity to work with their veterinarian and AI technician, giving Jennifer a more complete picture of their farm and the systems that manage it.

"It was a good opportunity to build my network in the ag community," Jennifer says. "The Mentor program is important because you can never stop learning about this industry. I got a new perspective."

Those perspectives will stick with Jennifer for the future, and have led her to be an advocate for the PDPW Mentor program and for agriculture.

"I would, and have, told other students that this program is a great experience," she says. "Because of this program I am an Ag Ambassador here at UW-Platteville. I want to get more people involved in agriculture."

Jennifer also enjoyed the second part of the program, attending the PDPW Business Conference with the Dolans.

"You not only get to shadow a producer that takes time out of their busy day to mentor you, but you get to experience the PDPW Business Conference with that mentor," Jennifer said. "The conference opened up my eyes to new advances and technologies within the dairy industry."

At the end of the day, it's the people that Jennifer valued the most from her experience---and will motivate her to come back for more. "I built friendships through this program and I got to meet many people in the industry that gave me advice," she says. "The PDPW Mentor Program gets the younger generation, like me, involved with this growing industry. I plan on being a part of the Mentor program again next year!"

The Professional Dairy Producers Foundation has sponsored the PDPW Mentor Program for years as a way to build the youth of our industry. More than 450 young professionals have gone through the program since its inception in 1996.

