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WCC SENIOR WRITING COMPETITION WINNER

It's Saturday morning, in my opinion, the best day of the WCC week, prepping for confirmation classes, the smell of revive, paints and baby oil hovers in the air. Every single team member from every province is exhausted from the past week of festivities, yet still smiling, working together to get their heifers ready for the final hurrah. New friends have been made, skills have been learned, and the future of Canadian dairy looks more promising than ever as the new members have gotten hooked on the dairy industry. We have made it through the week of WCC and man did it fly by. In the short time that we have spent together, I have grown close to countless members learning their stories, hobbies, and the challenges they have faced so far in their young lives. I have learned more about myself throughout the week than I thought would be possible. Like the amount of patience I can have for some of our junior members even at 4:30 a.m., or how rewarding it is when your team and its members succeed. But how did we get here? Let's rewind the story by a couple of years.

My passion for cows and the dairy industry began the day my parents brought me to the barn just days after I was born. It was milking time, and like most dairy kids there was no babysitter present, and mum and dad had chores to do. I was sitting in the corner of the parlour in my little stroller listening to the continuous low-pitched rumble of our double twelve Delaval milking system, air compressors rolling and exit gates closing, I was in my element. Day after



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day I would sleep in my corner as the cows were milked and the calves got fed. I didn't know it then but as my parents retold the story to me over and over again, it became clear that it was one of my favourite places to be.

That didn't change as I grew up, I was always in the barn around the farm or in the fields pestering my parents, brothers, or grandparents on how or why things worked the way they did. It was the perfect environment to grow up in and looking back on my younger years I am extremely privileged to be able to have grown up on a family farm like ours. However, I had a hard time understanding that not every child grew up in the same setting as myself. It was elementary school when I came to the realization my classmates did not all live on a farm like I did and didn't share any of the same experiences as me. I became slightly ashamed of my dairy roots. Even though I thought (and still do) that cows, calves, and big tractors, were the coolest things on earth there was the perception among my peers that farm kids were just smelly weird kids that didn't need to be in school.

Entering university was an eye-opening experience for me. Not only were the classes more difficult but the diversity of people was amazing. The amount of people I talked to who had such little experience

or even knowledge of where food comes from was disappointing. Most of my new urban peers had little understanding of an agricultural system or why one would even study agriculture, bringing back the stereotype of "smelly weird farm kid". I did my best to explain the ins and outs of your everyday farm operation however was relieved when I found the Aggie buildings on campus.

It wasn't till the spring of 2022 that I had learned about WCC. As soon as my leader emailed me about joining, I rallied my brother, and we signed up excited to learn more about the "fancy" side of dairy. The Covid years had just ended, and I was eager to see something new. Not exactly understanding what I had signed myself up for, I arranged myself a heifer to showcase at the event. I ended up picking a Jersey calf from another farm, and while we didn't have a single Jersey cow on the home farm at the time, I quickly grew fond of the breed. From prep events to learning how to properly lead my calf, presenting my reasons, to even painting a display there was something to enjoy about it all. Initially, I thought it was all a little overkill for a little heifer show. When WCC week finally came around, I was even more surprised when the waste buckets came out for catching excrement. I had shown horses in my past but the calves we had with us were living like royalty in comparison.



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Beginning WCC in my second last year of eligibility was a lot smoother than I thought it would be. While it was very challenging competing against contestants who had been perfecting the art for the past ten years, they welcomed me in with open arms and gave me tips and tricks to improve in certain areas. I learned that all our prep work was necessary and that WCC was not just a little heifer show. It was a big program that gathered a large amount of industry professionals and some of the best dairypersons within the country.

Joining the WCC team connected me with a handful of people who also had a passion for dairy. Not everyone stemmed from a farm, but we all had a common interest in dairy. The family I borrowed heifers from for my past two WCC years were especially helpful and served as my mentors. I look up to them tremendously for their herdsman-ship, wealth of dairy knowledge, leadership, and passion for the industry. From feeding and raising my calf to helping me learn the ins and outs of showmanship, judging, calf care, and acting as a leader for the Manitoba team. The province and myself included are fortunate to have them as producers and advocates of the industry.

My biggest takeaway from the WCC program was bonding and forming connections. Don't get me

wrong I absolutely love the cow side of it all but in the end, the heifers will turn into cows, and fade away, and the memories will become distant but the people you meet throughout the week will always be there. They are the people we will be working with and alongside in the future, the ones that come together during tough times and the ones keeping Canadian dairy alive.

So, while I might just be a weird farm kid, I am proud to be a part of the Canadian dairy industry. I am proud to be a part of something so special with incredible people in it. That have extreme heart and passion for their animals, the land they walk on and the people that they work with. I am thankful for WCC and the people it has connected me with enabling me to embrace my dairy roots, and as I reflect on my past two years in the program I acknowledge the things it has taught me and the experiences it has given. I am extremely optimistic about the future of Canadian agriculture and excited to see where the industry will go with its young leaders.

Isabelle Reutter | SENIOR