

Jersey Youth Academy Builds the Future

For more than a decade, Jersey Youth Academy has served as a proving ground for the next generation of leaders in the Jersey dairy business. Designed as an immersive “Jersey boot camp,” the Academy delivers far more than a week of learning—it builds clarity, confidence and connections that continue long after participants leave Columbus, Ohio.

The ninth class of Jersey Youth Academy was held July 13–18, 2025, bringing together 35 rising high school seniors through college juniors from across the country. Selected from a competitive national applicant pool, participants represented 18 states and demonstrated strong motivation, preparation and commitment to the Jersey breed.

With full involvement from the Ohio-based staff of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) and National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ), along with the presidents of both organizations and an exceptional lineup of guest speakers, the Academy provided a comprehensive survey of the Jersey business today—and where it is headed tomorrow. From genetics and appraisal to processing, marketing, finance and animal health, participants explored how Jerseys fit into a rapidly evolving dairy industry.

“For me, Academy was very beneficial for understanding the Jersey world—classification, history, the Jersey Jug tradition and other things that make our breed so special,” said Kelsey Hardy, Dodgeville, Wis. “Seeing the large robotic Jersey farm showed the endless possibilities for Jersey cattle and how to diversify for maximum profitability.”

The Academy’s core mission—to attract, educate and retain talented young people for careers in the Jersey dairy business—was evident in every aspect of the program. Participants engaged in presentations, farm visits, hands-on workshops and candid discussions with industry professionals, gaining insight into both traditional and emerging career paths.

“When coming here, I wanted to be part of the dairy industry,” shared Zach Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y. “This helped me see how many backgrounds and different jobs that I could potentially do.”

That breadth of opportunity resonated throughout the week. Keynote speaker Jonathan Merriam, Jersey program manager for Semex, left the attendees inspired to seek their dreams.

“Jonathan Merriam’s message to take

advantage of opportunities such as internships has stuck with me,” stated Lee Taylor, Booneville, Miss. “I have taken advantage of more opportunities thrown my way because of his words.”

The class was also exposed to sessions with leaders in nutrition, genetics, finance, veterinary medicine and policy. Students saw firsthand how diverse skill sets can be applied within the Jersey industry.

“The most valuable information that I gained was the vast career opportunities our industry has to offer,” said Alexis Schultz, Marion, N.Y. “Hearing from speakers and going on tours with such diversity helped me gain experiences and valuable insight about different sectors of the dairy industry.”

“It was good to hear from the many professionals in the industry that shared their journeys,” echoed Patrick Bosley, Malone, N.Y. “They showed us how many options there are available to us and it is okay if our career paths change.”

Farm and industry tours brought classroom concepts to life. At Albright Jerseys LLC, owners Joel and Fred Albright welcomed students into their 800-cow robotic herd, where hands-on genetic exercises and appraisal demon-



The 35 members of Jersey Youth Academy IX are pictured on day one of the program at the Ohio State University Veterinary Hospital. Pictured front row, from left: Kaitlyn Crompton, Marina Cox, Ashlynn Lenker, Hailey Horton, Addison Hubbell, Sophie Leach, Sam Peila, Riley Whisler, PaytonLynn Baldwin, and Kelsey Hardy. Second row, from left: Emma Roeben, Robyn Porter, Reese Burdette, Noelle Vos, Sarah Diehl, Norah Bechtel, Eden Cooper, Tatum Lancaster, Brailey Livingston, Isabella Wilbur, Sarah Hill, Julia Fanning, and Patrick Bosley. Third row, from left: AJ Coppersmith, Zach Chittenden, Lee Taylor, Alexis Schultz, Miranda Nickerson, Lauren Bryant, Ava Kolodzienski, Sofia Zina, Kiara Konyn, Cassie Bohnert, and Delaney Barber.

strations reinforced practical decision-making. Visits to Pearl Valley Cheese, Young's Jersey Dairy, Woodruff Farms and Select Sires Inc. showcased processing, agri-tourism, direct marketing and A.I. career opportunities.

"I really enjoyed talking with the owners at Pearl Valley Cheese, seeing the facility and sampling their cheeses," Schultz added.

"My most memorable visit was to Select Sires," said Tatum Lancaster, Tillamook, Ore. "I loved seeing the operation and all of the pathways that it offers."

The practical knowledge learned throughout the week was expressed by several of the students.

"Learning more about pedigrees will be invaluable to me," said Kayleigh Smith, Bowman, Ga. "I am on the team at University of Georgia's dairy and I have managed the genetics for the past two and a half years. Even though I look at pedigrees a lot, I know have a much better understanding of them. We set three priority traits for our herd every semester and we change them up. Now I know more about the other ones I haven't been selecting for."

Sofia Zina, Hadley, Mass., had some of the same observations. "Being able to take home more information and knowledge of pedigrees was very valuable to me. The genetic session taught me even more about how to make decisions to mate our cows at home."

Beyond technical knowledge, students repeatedly pointed to adaptability as a defining lesson of the week.

"I learned adaptability is possible," said Hailey Horton, Mesilla Park, N.M. "Both Young's Jersey Dairy and Woodruff Farm showed this, and they are successful."

Just as impactful as the curriculum were the relationships formed. Academy fosters a unique environment where students connect deeply with peers who share their passion for Jerseys, while also building meaningful professional networks.

"The best part of Academy was being given opportunities that I would not have been able to do on my own," said Delaney Barber, DeWitt, Iowa. "Seeing the wide range of job opportunities that revolve around the dairy industry really stuck with me."

Riley Whisler, Salinas, Calif., echoed that sentiment: "Coming in, I didn't know anyone. Five days later, I have a roomful of friends that I've built relationships with all around the Jersey cow. Being able to network with industry professionals opened my eyes to a lot of opportunities within the breed."

Those connections endure well be-



Class IX of Jersey Youth Academy had the opportunity to learn cowside and in the classroom from industry leaders. In the first photo, Noelle Vos, Kelsey Hardy, Lee Taylor, Sam Peila, Sofia Zina and Ava Kolodzienski talked about type appraisal with Ron Mosser. AJ Coppersmith and Reese Burdette listened intently to keynote speaker Jonathan Merriam as he addressed the class.



yond the week in Columbus. Since the first Academy in 2009, 281 individuals from 38 states have participated. Many have gone on to return to their home dairies, enter allied industry roles or remain actively involved with AJCA and NAJ—continuing relationships that shape the future of the breed.

"It is truly a once-in-a-lifetime program," said Isabella Wilbur, Orwell, Vt. "The relationships we built will open doors in the future for all of us."

Looking Ahead

Jersey Youth Academy's impact continues to grow. Class X will be held in July 2027, with applications opening September 1, 2026, and due December 1. As always, all participant costs—including transportation to Columbus—are covered, making the experience equivalent to a \$2,400 scholarship.

The Academy endowment currently stands at \$758,923, ensuring this one-of-a-kind program remains accessible to talented youth nationwide. Contributions can be made at any time by contacting the AJCA office at 614/861-3636.

As the dairy industry evolves, Jersey Youth Academy remains steadfast in its mission: equipping young people with



Alex Coppersmith, Patrick Bosley, Lee Taylor and Zachary Chittenden at Select Sires following the bull parade.



Chuck Ellis, president of Pearl Valley Cheese, shared the company's story and the importance of Jersey milk to their products.

the knowledge, vision and relationships needed to lead the Jersey business into the future—one class at a time.



One of the stops each year is at The Wilds in southeast Ohio. It spans nearly 10,000 acres of reclaimed coal-mined land, now transformed into one of North America's largest open-range habitats for rare and endangered species from around the world. Before heading out on the Sunset Safari the group, along with AJCA President Alan Chittenden, gathered for a photo with the scenic backdrop.