



College students earn scholarships through *Dairy's Future Leaders* writing contest

California's leading dairy organizations have announced the winners of the *Dairy's Future Leaders* college student writing contest. The contest asked students to share what sustainability means to them and how they envision their futures as leaders in the dairy community. Genevieve Regli, sophomore at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, received first place honors. Second and third place awards went to Hayley Fernandes, sophomore at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and Andrew Skidmore, junior at Fresno State University, respectively.



From left to right: Genevieve Regli, Hayley Fernandes, and Andrew Skidmore earned top honors for their essays on dairy sustainability.

"I was excited to provide my insight on sustainability," said Regli, whose family has been dairy farming in Ferndale for more than 120 years. "What I've seen my whole life is that dairy farmers experience some very good times and some very hard times. We have to be looking forward, and we have to get creative in order to survive and make sure we can pass the farm on to the next generation."

The contest was offered as part of the [California Dairy Sustainability Summit](#), a program that brings together dairy farmers, state officials, researchers, and other key stakeholders to help advance the economic and environmental sustainability of the state's family dairy farms. The Summit is hosted by Dairy Cares, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Milk Advisory Board, Dairy Council of California, and the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program. Through the writing contest, current dairy leaders learned how the next generation views challenges and opportunities.

Regli is majoring in agricultural communications and aspires to one day own and operate a dairy farm educational center. "The reality is that today's college students are the future consumers and future leaders of our state," Regli said. "I know from working with students outside of the college of agriculture that we have to start conversations with our shared values, and we have to be prepared to adapt to their needs as consumers."

To support students' academic and professional pursuits, the top three winning students were awarded scholarships, sponsored by Milk Producers Council (MPC), nonprofit organization representing dairy families throughout California. Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, Director of Regulatory & Economic Affairs for MPC was pleased with the level of participation and the quality of essays submitted.

“Dairy farmers face a lot of challenges, as our state continues to raise the bar for many environmental standards: water quality and conservation, methane reduction, and air quality improvements,” Vanden Heuvel said. “It’s good that students start to think about how all these pieces fit together and their impacts on economic and social sustainability.”

Contest entries were submitted from across colleges and universities in California and other states, and the essays discussed a wide range of issues. Participants included both students born and raised on dairy farms and others whose interest in dairy began differently. All contestants expressed interest in pursuing careers throughout the broader dairy industry—including teaching and research, mechanical and agronomic support, and marketing and communications.

Second-place winner Hayley Fernandes is majoring in dairy science, with a minor in law and society. Her family owns and operates a dairy farm in Pixley. Fernandes plans to pursue a law degree and become an advocate for dairy farmers. “California is very progressive,” she said. “While that can be difficult for farmers, it also helps us stay ahead of the curve. That’s something I hear my dad and uncles talk about a lot. I’d like to become an expert on issues that impact farmers, so I can help them continue to progress in ways that are economically sustainable.”

Third-place winner Andrew Skidmore is a mechanical engineering major with a passion for dairy and agriculture. “I want to work in agriculture, and I want to help solve problems, both the mechanical kind and those that involve people,” Skidmore said. “One challenge I’m fascinated with is the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. What tools and strategies can we use to help farmers manage their water? I think I could be a part of that solution.”

The top ten winning stories have been [posted on the Dairy Cares website](#). *Dairy’s Future Leaders* contest awards were intended to be announced at the California Dairy Sustainability Summit, previously planned for March 2020. The event has been postponed, now to take place November 5-6, 2020 in Sacramento. While the COVID-19 outbreak has recently posed many challenges to the dairy community and to college students, it has not disheartened the spirit of these passionate young leaders. Skidmore said he’s still an optimist: “That just means there’s more problems for us to help solve.”

Congratulations to all the winners and participants, and good luck in your bright futures!

Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Cattlemen’s Association, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area, Dairy Institute of California, F & R Ag Services, GHD, Inc., Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O’Lakes, Merck Animal Health, Milk Producers Council, Ruan Transport Corp., Yosemite Farm Credit, Zenith Insurance Company, and others. For information, visit DairyCares.com or call 916-441-3318. To subscribe to the e-newsletter, contact news@dairycares.com.