

'Hands-On' Approach Brings Employment For Graduates Of Delaware Valley College's Dairy Science Program

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the whole thing leading up to the Farm Show.

"It's a recognition of their hard work. You have to really put a lot of work into it."

The Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association matched the Farm Show premium, bringing the total winnings up to about \$450 — a substantial honor, according to Gross.

But the coursework is not all show. Each student, including those not enrolled in agricultural studies, is required to complete an employment program, which involves spending 960 hours in job directly related to the major.

For dairy science freshmen, according to Gross, students are exposed to all aspects of raising livestock, including horses, sheep, swine, poultry, beef, and dairy cattle. In the second semester, they learn the principles of dairy science and are exposed to an overview of the dairy industry, including preparing an animal for showing.

"They observe milking, they observe the operation of the dairy and how feeding's done, and are presented with a general overview to bring everybody up to the same levels," said Gross.

They believe that 'Mom and Dad's done it like this and you have to diplomatically explain to them that maybe that's not the best way, or here's another alternative.'

Sophomores learn selection of cattle and complete studies on genetics. They are instructed in how to evaluate and judge cattle.

Juniors and seniors are introduced to the business aspects of running a dairy, including feed, breeding, and overall business management. A term paper examines all aspects of running a dairy business.

At that time, the students "have been exposed to all aspects of the dairy industry," said Gross. "They've been exposed to the marketing of animals, they put up a mock sale in which they have to come up with a sales catalogue, and they have to put an ad in the catalogue for their animals. They learn how to work up an ad. They learn all aspects of taking good pictures.

"We try to expose them to as much practical education as we can in all aspects of the dairy industry."

For those who come from a

farm, "we sometimes have heated discussions on how things should be done. But hopefully we end up every day getting a little bit from it. Sometimes some of the things we do here we do just as an educational tool to show them what good or bad can come of doing something."

That practical, hands-on advantage "tends to stick with them much more," he said.

"We have not gotten to the point of saying, 'You do this, and this and this will happen. There're still genetics involved. And even though you can come up to 95 percent reliability, there's still that 5 percent . . . You may find that you've covered all the aspects and left one thing out, and that's going to affect the herd.'"

Gross said that while they give all the cows the best advantage in feeding, breeding, and management, the dairy industry "is still a combination of science and art."

Some students have never been on a dairy farm in their life and decide they want to be part of the industry.

That's how Gross came to dairy farming. He was raised in the city of Pittsburgh and worked on a farm for a dairyman during the summer of his junior year in high school. At

the time, he wasn't certain whether he wanted to be a dairy farmer or an agricultural engineer.

"In Pittsburgh, all the high schools were geared toward your becoming an engineer, with all the steel industry (that's back when the steel industry was running strong), so I decided I'd like to pursue a career in agriculture."

A DVC graduate, when Gross made the decision in 1973 to stay in the dairy industry, there were 68 cows milking with a stanchion barn. There were three breeds — Holsteins, Brown Swiss, and Ayrshires.

Improvement of the herd is key to rounding out the education of the dairy science majors.

"We're constantly trying to breed to the better bulls, use TMR, and made a couple more improvements," said Gross. The milk production has been rising the last six months. For bedding, the dairy has been using peanut hulls, which are becoming more difficult to obtain.



Students not only are in charge of showing and fitting the animals, but also maintain the display at the Farm Show. The exhibit, featuring the pedigree boards and keeping the area clean and open, netted the college the overall Housekeeping Award the past few years, according to Gross, pictured here.



For those who complete the program and graduate, employment opportunities abound, according to the college. Here, Mike Marshall, freshman, is hard at work.

Work on the freestalls will include the installation, this summer, of rubber-filled mattresses.

Feed is combination of high moisture shelled corn, alfalfa haylage, corn silage, and a clover-timothy hay.

"We're trying to improve our milk and protein levels, at the same time decreasing a little bit of our fat," said Gross. But the constant

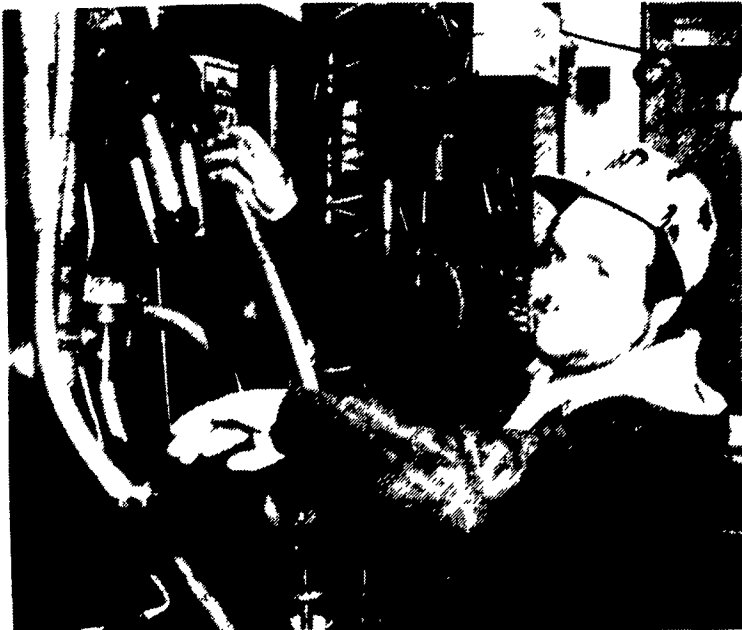
challenge is to "balance between production and type.

"And we have a different set of criteria than most farmers — we believe that we have to represent the breeds to the general public, so we're trying to strive for the type animal with production." Gross indicated that many farmers can focus in on production and now

have to worry constantly about the "look" of the cow.

But graduates admit their work pays off.

Said Chris Beadling, the college's director of public relations, "Every alumnus I talk to seems so grateful to DVC for the education he or she received that helped to get that foot in the door."



Herdsman Shane Betz readies the equipment at DVC for milking.



Mrs. Leckey's first grade class from Abington Friends toured the Delaware Valley College in April.