

# On Duty For Dairy

*Ambassador handles a big job speaking out for a vital Washington state industry*

By Audra Hoefler

Having grown up on dairy farms her entire life, it seems a natural progression for Kristyn Mensonides of Sunnyside to serve as Washington state Dairy Ambassador.

Though competition was tough, the recent high school graduate has made great strides in her public speaking skills since taking the reins as county and, subsequently, state ambassador.

“I wasn’t very good at public speaking at first, but I have improved,” says Kristyn.

Her focuses include discussing income as related to dairies, and how the economy and every business is affected by the dairy industry; new feed and new technology, namely robotic milking machines that have become popular in Europe.

“The machines are slowly coming to America because they cut labor costs and are very efficient,” says Kristyn. “But robots are cost-prohibitive here right now.”

As dairy ambassador, Kristyn pro-

promotes the industry with school presentations. As Yakima County Dairy Ambassador, she targeted second-graders.

“I took real-life calves to schools throughout the valley,” says Kristyn. “I really wanted kids to pet a calf and get back to the basics of where milk comes from. I made ice cream with some students, too. Their smiles were pretty fun to see.”

Kristyn’s parents, Theresa and Art, emigrated to the United States from Friesland, Holland, in 1981. The family later moved from Southern California to the Yakima Valley and partnered in a dairy for four years. They then leased a dairy and, finally, in 2000, built the Mensonides Dairy on Fisher Road in Sunnyside.

The 1,000-acre farm is home to 5,300 milking cows—each of which is milked twice a day—and a total of 12,000 animals, including heifers and calves.

Between 20 and 30 calves are born every day, year-round. The farm employs 60 full- or part-time employees.

As a fifth-grader, Kristyn trained cows for fitting and showing, and helped around the dairy as needed. She was in 4-H for eight years and FFA the past four years, the last as chapter president.

She showed heifers at the Yakima Valley Junior Fair for eight years. In August, she showed a milking cow for the first time.

A favorite activity was the farm olympics, where Kristyn and other FFA members hosted farm activities for youngsters at elementary schools. All of that time, she worked on the farm.

“I fed baby calves, rode on the tractor with dad when he cut corn and also changed sprinklers,” says Kristyn. “My sisters would all go shopping and I’d stay here with my dad. Living on a dairy farm has taught me responsibility, hard work and to never quit. You have to hold on, even when you have your bad days.”

Kristyn has job shadowed two veterinarians the past two years and will continue this year. Scott Abbott and Mike Wedam helped her learn pre-vet skills, including checking to see whether a cow is pregnant, giving vaccinations and working in the hospital barn.



Growing up on a dairy farm has been a big plus for Kristyn Mensonides in her role as Washington state dairy ambassador.

“Having that experience will be great if I decide to pursue an animal science degree,” says Kristyn.

Promoting the dairy industry has brought rewards to the once-shy young lady.

“I’ve learned interview skills throughout this experience,” says Kristyn.

Last June, she traveled to Lynnwood for the three-day state ambassador competition. Participants prepared three speeches, including a school presentation and two promotional speeches.

“I really enjoy speaking to civic groups,” says Kristyn. “I love it because they understand what I’m talking about. I love hearing their memories of growing up on farms.”

“She’s become much more confident while speaking and presenting herself to the public over the past year,” says Bev Koopmans, volunteer adviser for Kristyn and Grandview dairy owner. “She moved from shy to more outgoing.”

Kristyn’s parents have seen a distinct change in her, too.

“She’s always been very shy, even in church as a little girl,” says Theresa. “On her report cards, it always said, ‘Does not like to participate in class.’ She just wanted to be in the background. It’s been neat to see her change.”



**Kristyn leads her milk cow Gabrielle, which she showed for the first time in August. Gabrielle gives 90 to 100 pounds of milk a day, far more than the average of 70 to 80 pounds.**

“I think it’s been real good,” says Art. “I’m very proud of her.”

Both agree it is “great” that this year’s ambassador was born and raised on a dairy farm. Those competing for the title can be involved in any facet of the dairy industry.

Kristyn graduated from Sunnyside Christian High School last year and has taken a year off from college to fulfill the ambassador’s responsibilities. She will follow in three of her older sisters’ footsteps next fall and attend Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, to pursue business and possibly an animal science degree.

“It reminds me of the Yakima Valley

and has the best agriculture program of the private colleges,” says Kristyn.

Her immediate focus, however, is on the responsibilities that come with the title of State Dairy Ambassador.

This month, she will travel to the first Washington Interscholastic Activities Association sporting event of many. There, she schedules and assigns all county dairy ambassadors to jobs, hands out state sports awards and hosts a booth to answer dairy questions and play educational games with visitors.

Later, Kristyn will speak to legislators and senators at Dairy Day in Olympia. In May, she will travel to the FFA State Convention in Pullman. Throughout the year, she will hand out awards for 4-H and FFA at fairs and fitting/showing competitions.

She also participated in opening ceremonies at the Washington State Fair in Puyallup and stayed there promoting the dairy industry for five days.

She will participate in hundreds of events.

Kristyn receives a \$14,000 scholarship for serving as State Dairy Ambassador and earns a per diem for every four hours she works.

She has set lofty goals for the next year.

“I want to do at least 100 school presentations, either making ice cream or taking a calf to classes,” Kristyn says. “I’m outgoing, but I’d like to be more outgoing. I’d like to meet 1 million people.”

Kristyn’s future is sure to include dairy farming.

“I would love to marry a dairy farmer,” she says. “That would be awesome. I’d love to take over this dairy some day.” ■