

Saints Spotlight: Belle Dallam '18 & Her Cow Competitions



Will Torrey, Dec 20 2016

Belle Dallam '18 stays busy, both on and off campus. A V Former from Bel Air Maryland, Belle runs cross-country, plays basketball, and rows crew at St. Andrew's (not to mention her avid involvement in the School's Polar Bear Jump Club), she also participates in 4-H dairy cow judging competitions during her school breaks, a pursuit that's led her to events across Maryland and Pennsylvania, and even into Wisconsin. We sat down with Belle to discuss her 4-H involvement and her farming background.

Can you tell us a little about where you're from and your family's history with farming and livestock?

I come from a very small dairy farm in Bel Air, Maryland called Broom's Bloom Dairy. The farm goes back to 1726, and I'm the ninth generation to live there. We're currently milking fifty-three cows and we have a small hog operation with about six sows. At any given time we usually raising two litters. Over the years, we've been a mix of livestock and field, but right now we're mainly dairy farmers.

What exactly do you mean when you say 'field'? What do you grow on the property?

We grow almost all of the crops we use to feed our cows. We buy some feed, but we grow corn, soybeans, as well as barley.

So it's very sustainable; you raise the animals there, and you also grow the feed that they eat?

Yes. We also grow our own different types of hay that we bale and use as feed.

You were involved in some competitions this summer. Can you tell us about that?

I've done three different competitions, including the Maryland State Competition, which took place at the end of the summer, held at the Maryland State Fair, in Timonium. I've been doing that competition since I was eight. After that competition, I qualified to make the team that competes at the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, PA and the World Dairy Expo in Madison, WI.

What was the nature of the competitions?

The team I was on is dairy judging. It's mostly based the cows' appearance. There are four cows in each class, all the same age. We have to rank them based on which cow is best, and then we get judged on how correctly we judge them.

Can you tell me a little about the ways in which the cows are judged? What are the criteria for a good cow?

If it's a heifer class, which means they're not in milk, we mostly focus on their body structure, their correctness of frame into their feet and legs, and how much flesh they're carrying. You want the cows to be clean cut, but in heifer classes you're looking for correctness, so that when they mature, they can still be functional.

Then there are the cow classes, which means the cows are producing milk. In those competitions, 40 percent of the cow's score is based on the mammary system--the udder--so you look at the strength of attachments and various other elements. But you're also still looking at all the attributes you examined for the heifer classes. You're still looking at the frame their feet and legs, their body and everything about that.

What do you like most about participating in these competitions?

I love seeing the high quality of cattle out there. I really enjoy that. I also enjoy thinking about the functionality of an animal because at home I milk cows every day. To me, when I'm judging them, I'm thinking about which cow would I want to milk every day. Which cow's going to be most productive? I like being able to look at a cow and see all its faults and see all its correctness and ... I've been doing it for so long that it's ...

It's a part of your life.

Yeah. Exactly.

Do you think you'll continue to compete?

I'm done competing in 4-H, but I really hope to be part of a college team and judge at that level as well.

Do you know what you want to study when you move on from Saint Andrew's?

I'm not exactly sure, but definitely something in the agriculture field. Probably leaning towards dairy.

What is your favorite part about life at Saint Andrew's?

I would have to say the people. We're all very different, but we all have the same connection: a shared goal to be genuine and good. That's something you don't really find in the outside community. It's a special thing.