

Experience and Mentoring Brought Youth From Chicago Suburbs to Dairying

by Shannon Hext

At 20 years old, Drew Scott was at a crossroads in his life. A few key experiences steered this young man from the suburbs of Chicago to dairy farming.

In 2010, Drew knew he needed to make a decision. "I had decided to take time off of school and figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I got to the point where I knew if I did not go back to school I was not going to go back. I knew that I was interested in agriculture so I picked a program that would allow me to do expand my knowledge on it. I ended up in the Dairy Herd Management program at Southwest Wisconsin Technical College."

Luckily, Drew had a passion to steer him---gained from experiences on his college roommate's farm a few years before. "I was not actually active on a farm until Travis invited me to his family farm. I never looked back. I found out that I loved working with cows the most, which makes dairying a perfect niche for me to slide into."



Drew had his path, but he knew he had to grow the network of people he could learn from. So he turned to a program he saw as an opportunity. "I applied for the PDPW Mentor Program because I did not grow up within the industry and was looking to see as many operations as I possibly could. Through this program, I was also able to attend the PDPW Conference, and network with other dairy producers. I saw this as a way to make meaningful connections within the industry as well as extend my knowledge on dairying as a whole," he says.

Drew was paired with mentor Rick Roden from Rob-N-Cin Farms. Rick took him around the farm and showed Drew their calf care and feeding program. "That was something I was really looking forward to seeing and learning more about. While helping out with calf feeding I was given the opportunity to tube feed a calf, which was something I had never had the chance to do before," Drew says. "It was truly amazing to see how well they took care of their calves and the great way they housed them as well. I was also given a tour of their parlor which was great. I was then able to see how they used reclaimed bedding to bed their stalls and buildings on the farm. I learned all about the feeding, breeding, housing and general rules they used to raise their heifers. I got the chance to help with a fresh heifer and to bring a newborn calf in from the maternity pack."

To say it was a positive experience is an understatement, according to Drew. "This program is more important than most people even realize. It allows young people like myself to experience successful operations as well as see how other people are doing things. They can take away or maybe use some of these ideas within their own operation or job."

"My experience with the program was immensely positive and I would recommend it to anyone that is even remotely considering the possibility of doing it," he says. "Rick and I still communicate fairly often. The most important thing for myself was starting to build a network of resources that I can go to and ask for help or advice when something comes up. It is hugely important to have contacts within the industry. The more people you know the better. "

Those three experiences---time on his roommate's family farm, his schooling and the Mentor program---have helped Drew meet his goal, to work with cows. His roommate is now his business partner, and they are running an 80-cow dairy farm.

"It is quite a change from the city," he says with a smile. "I am extremely glad that I have found something that I thoroughly enjoy doing. "

Like most dairy producers, Drew wouldn't be anywhere but on the farm. And yet, he is very realistic about the future. "I have a huge mountain to climb to get the farm to where I want it to be, yet I look at it as a worthwhile venture doing something that I absolutely love to do."

The Professional Dairy Producers Foundation has sponsored the PDPW Mentor Program for years as a way to build the youth of our industry. More than 300 young professionals have gone through the program since its inception in 1996.