

OOPS...they did it again

MSU dairy products team takes top national honors

Long hours of practice paid off for Mississippi State University's Dairy Products Evaluation team at the International Collegiate Dairy Products Evaluation Contest.

The MSU undergraduate team placed first among 18 U.S. and Canadian teams at the Nov. 6 event in Lakeland, Fla. The win marked more than a dozen times Mississippi State students have taken top honors in the event.

The contest included judging eight samples of six types of dairy products—milk, Cheddar cheese, yogurt, ice cream, butter and cottage cheese, said food science professor Charles White.

"Official industry judges prejudice the samples of each product type," White said. "The students then evaluate the products, and the students whose scores most closely match those of the official judges are declared product winners and overall winners."

The three-member MSU undergraduate team included Neil Bogart of Birmingham, Ala., Justin Larsen of Decatur, Ala., and Eric Steer of Cottage Grove, Tenn. All are seniors in the Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion.

Bogart was the high-scoring individual in the all-products division of the competition and won "The Best Taster in the Land" honors.

"While training for the competition, I learned to identify the attributes dairy products—both good and bad," Bogart said. "I plan to work in the dairy industry following graduation and what I've learned will help me deal with real-life situations that occur in the processing of dairy products."

Larsen was the second-high-scoring individual.

"It's rare for a school to have the first- and second-place overall winners," White said. "This year's team

worked extremely hard for the honor, coming in to practice every morning at 6:30 this semester."

Steer finished 12th overall out of 54 contestants. He also won the Joe Larson Merit Award, an honor given to the student displaying outstanding professionalism, courtesy and leadership skills.

MSU graduate student Estela Casapia of Peru also took honors in the Graduate Student Division, finishing fifth overall and placing first in ice cream and second in butter and cottage cheese.

White and food science research associate Julie Wilson coach the team. White has coached eight championship teams since joining the MSU faculty in 1985. He and Wilson have worked together on the last four.

"The competition is extremely intense, with each contestant required to make more than 400 decisions about the quality of a variety of dairy products within a four and a half hour time span," White said. "The experience they gain through the completion means they will not have to rely on someone else to judge the quality of a product during their careers in the food industry."

Earlier this year, MSU students also won a regional competition at the Kraft Research Center in Chicago. Larsen finished first overall. Junior Giovanni Duran from Belize, South America, finished second, and junior Mary Edith King of Carriere took third-place honors.

