



73rd Alice in Dairyland Top Candidates Announced

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Editor's note: Download group and individual photos [here](#).

DELAVAN – Today, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) announced the six top candidates for the 73rd Alice in Dairyland, moving one step closer to the selection of the next Alice.

Following an extensive interview process over the next eight weeks, the 73rd Alice in Dairyland will be selected from among the top candidates at the conclusion of the Alice in Dairyland Finals, scheduled for May 14-16 at various locations throughout Walworth County.

Alice in Dairyland is a full-time communications professional serving as Wisconsin's agricultural ambassador. Each Alice is employed by DATCP for one year and travels thousands of miles across the state, presenting to students, completing media interviews and attending community events to promote the state's agriculture industry. The 73rd Alice in Dairyland will begin serving June 1, 2020.

"The Alice in Dairyland selection process is unique in that it takes your communications and interpersonal skills to the next level and allows each candidate to showcase the public relations skills required for being Wisconsin's agricultural ambassador," said 72nd Alice in Dairyland Abigail Martin. "The personal growth the top candidates will experience just by being a part of the process will carry far into their future careers."

The six top candidates are: Rachel Gerbitz of Milton, Erica Helmer of Plymouth, Stephanie Hoff of Thorp, Kaitlin Konder of Glenwood City, Julia Nunes of Chippewa Falls and Grace Schroeder of Cashton.

About the candidates:

Rachel Gerbitz's earliest memories are from her family's small dairy farm. Although the family transitioned away from the farm when she was young, her passion for agriculture had been ignited. She became involved in 4-H and the Wisconsin Junior Holstein Association, which led her to pursue a degree in Dairy Science and Life Sciences Communication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. On campus, she was involved in Badger Dairy Club, Collegiate Farm Bureau, and the Association of Women in Agriculture. She has held various marketing roles with AgrAbility of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Dairy Youth Program, and Collegiate Farm Bureau. Upon graduation in 2019, she began working for Pioneer as a Dairy Promoter in Northeast Wisconsin. In her free time, Gerbitz raises registered jersey heifers and spends time with her niece and nephews.

"I have always looked up to Alice in Dairyland as a role model in Wisconsin agriculture," said Gerbitz. "As Alice, I will use my unique perspective to connect with various audiences to share the diversity of Wisconsin agriculture."

Erica Helmer's passion for all things agriculture began at a young age. As the seventh generation to work and live on her family's registered Holstein farm, she credits the tradition that has been passed from generation to generation for her strong connection to the industry. Involvement in 4-H and FFA added to her passion for agriculture and provided many opportunities, including being honored as the 2016 National FFA Dairy Production Placement Proficiency Winner. Helmer attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she graduated in May 2019 with a degree in dairy science, with a science option. On campus, she was involved in Dairy Club, Collegiate Farm Bureau, Alpha Zeta and Block and Bridle. In addition, she led her dairy judging team to top honors at the Intercollegiate

Dairy Judging Contest during World Dairy Expo in 2018. After graduation, she accepted a position with Genetic Visions-ST, where she works in customer care. Helmer enjoys returning home to coach the Sheboygan County 4-H dairy judging team and assist with the Plymouth Youth Athletic Association softball program.

“Serving as the voice of Wisconsin agriculture would be an honor,” said Helmer. “As Alice, I will focus on educating all audiences about Wisconsin’s diverse agriculture industry while highlighting the impact it has on local communities and our state’s economy.”

Stephanie Hoff is a Wisconsin girl through and through. She loves everything Wisconsin has to offer, including cheese of every type and flavor, a bitter cold winter, and the state’s sports teams. Hoff found her passion in agriculture by being involved in her FFA chapter, showing pigs at the Clark County Fair, and eating at countless dairy breakfasts. Wanting to give back to agriculture, she continued her involvement into college by becoming involved with the Association of Women in Agriculture. She’s interned with the Wisconsin Farms Oral History Project, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and the Babcock Hall Dairy Plant. She also had her own radio show where she featured women in STEM fields, including several agricultural segments.

After graduating from UW-Madison with a degree in life sciences communication in December of 2019, she took a reporting position with WisBusiness and WisPolitics.com.

Hoff said, “My job as Alice will be to use my skills in journalism, broadcasting and marketing to promote Wisconsin’s vastly diverse agriculture industry and educate the public about Wisconsin agriculture.”

Kaitlin Konder found her love for the diverse world of agriculture, specifically the dairy industry, at a young age as the fifth generation to be raised on the family dairy farm. Growing up, Konder was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA, where she showed dairy at both the county and state fair. After graduating from high school, Konder served as a Wisconsin State FFA Vice President, where she traveled the state promoting agriculture and FFA to thousands of students. Two years later, she was selected as the St. Croix County Fairest of the Fair, where she served as a public relations professional for both the fair and agriculture industry. Konder recently graduated with honors from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Agricultural Business with a Finance emphasis. Konder plans to utilize her degree by becoming an agricultural loan officer to help farmers grow and succeed financially.

“It has been a goal of mine to become Alice in Dairyland since I was in my teens,” said Konder, “It would be a great honor to share my excitement and love for the agriculture industry by telling the story of all farmers and processors across the great state of Wisconsin!”

Julia Nunes grew up on her family’s registered Holstein dairy farm, where feeding calves and clipping dairy cattle for the county fair were just a couple of things that helped shape her childhood. During her teen years, she was heavily involved in her area Junior Holstein group and 4-H club. Nunes went on to study at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, where she was involved in the Gopher Dairy Club and Lambda Delta Phi Sorority. In 2017, she shared her knowledge of agriculture and the dairy industry while serving as the Northern Wisconsin State Fair’s Fairest of the Fair. Nunes interned at Redhead Creamery, where she sharpened her love of cheese. In May 2019, she graduated with bachelor’s degrees in Agricultural Communication & Marketing, and Animal Science, with minors in Agricultural & Food Business Management, and Horticulture. Upon graduation, she accepted a position with Kinni Hemp Company in River Falls.

“I will strive to be the role model that Alice in Dairyland was for me growing up,” said Nunes. “As Alice, I will explore Wisconsin’s agriculture and share my discoveries and knowledge gained with consumers and producers throughout the state.”

Grace Schroeder has a desire to give back to Wisconsin, the state that has shaped her life. Growing up on the family farm, she grew to appreciate the hard work, quality and tradition of Wisconsin’s agriculture industry. Long summer days at county fairs, demonstrating recipes with Wisconsin

agriculture products, and pitching into help with her family and friends' farm chores were a huge part of her childhood. Those memories influenced her decision to study public relations at St. Cloud State University. In college, she combined her passion of Wisconsin agriculture and communication, while working at the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, Pasture Pride Cheese, and Kickapoo Valley Ranch. She also used her past experiences as a Warren's Cranberry Princess and Miss Cashton to grow her portfolio as a public relations spokesperson. In May, she will complete her bachelor's degree in public relations with a minor in marketing.

"The entire state of Wisconsin knows Alice is a quality ambassador for all aspects of agriculture," said Schroeder. "If given the opportunity, I will uphold that tradition by inspiring and educating all generations like the past Alice's have done before me."

About the Alice in Dairyland program

In this highly visible and fast-paced position, Alice in Dairyland travels throughout the state teaching rural and urban audiences of all ages about Wisconsin's extensive agricultural industry. In the position, Alice cultivates relationships with television, radio and print media outlets; writes and delivers speeches; and utilizes social media to tell the stories of Wisconsin agriculture. Additional duties include developing and executing marketing plans, delivering classroom presentations, and networking with industry professionals.

Each year, a different Wisconsin county hosts the Alice in Dairyland interview and finals activities, with Walworth County serving as the host county for 2020. For event information, visit aliceindairyland.com.

Direct program questions to Alice in Dairyland Interim Program Manager, Debbie Gegare at 608-224-5115 or Debbie.Gegare@wi.gov.

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