



## SIX FINALISTS NAMED FOR 62<sup>ND</sup> ALICE IN DAIRYLAND POSITION

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*Note: For electronic photos of the finalists, please contact Nicole Breunig.*

MADISON –Six finalists have been named in the recruitment for Wisconsin’s 62<sup>nd</sup> Alice in Dairyland position.

“Serving as Alice in Dairyland and representing the \$51.5 billion agriculture industry in Wisconsin is an honor,” notes Ashley Huibregtse, 61st Alice in Dairyland. “The 62nd Alice in Dairyland will have a crucial role in promoting our diverse agricultural industry and encouraging people to support local farmers, producers, businesses, and economies by buying Wisconsin product.”

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection announced the names of the candidates, one of whom will be selected as Alice in Dairyland during a series of public events highlighting agriculture in Racine County, May 13-15.

The 2009 Alice in Dairyland finalists are:

**Peggy Dierickx**, De Pere, is the communications director for the Dairy Business Association (DBA). Dierickx grew up on her family’s dairy farm near Monticello and earned honors that include serving as a 2002-2003 Wisconsin state FFA officer and the 2004 Wisconsin Holstein Princess. Dierickx graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2006, earning a degree in agriculture journalism. During college, Dierickx held leadership roles in the Sigma Alpha Sorority, Agriculture Future of America, Badger Dairy Club, National Agri-Marketing Association, and Collegiate FFA. Prior to joining DBA, Dierickx was the executive director of the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation in Calmar, Iowa. She continues to promote agriculture by volunteering with the Cows on the Concourse planning committee, Wisconsin Farm Bureau, and Wisconsin FFA Alumni.

**Krista Kasten**, Richfield, will graduate from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in May 2009 with a bachelor’s degree in marketing communications-agriculture emphasis and a minor in agriculture business. Kasten grew up on her family’s dairy farm, which stimulated her involvement in the agriculture industry. Serving as the Washington County Junior Dairy Ambassador, Wisconsin Brown Swiss Queen, National Brown Swiss Youth Ambassador, and Washington County Fairest of the Fair allowed Kasten to educate the public about the origins of their food and the economic value of Wisconsin’s agriculture industry. Kasten’s internships at Purebred Publishing and Family Dairies USA provided her with extensive experience in print and media communication.

**Jodi Kauth**, Loyal, grew up working on her parent’s dairy farm. Kauth will graduate from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in May 2009 with her degree in agricultural business and economics and dairy science. She has an extensive background working with media, including hosting a program called "ACT on Ag" on the campus radio station. During college, Kauth was active with the National Agri-Marketing Association, Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow, and Dairy Club. Kauth is serving as Miss Clark County and was a runner-up for the Wisconsin State Fairest of the Fairs. Her work experience includes being a breeding program specialist with Genex/CRI and a 4-H program specialist with Clark County-UW Extension, where she assisted in a dry matter intake study and prepared news articles.

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ALICE IN DAIRYLAND – ADD ONE

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**Cheryl O'Brien**, Eastman, grew up showing dairy animals and working on her family's dairy farm. O'Brien served as an officer with the Crawford County Junior Holstein Association, the Eastman Cloverleaf 4-H Club, and the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Leader Council. She represented her county as Dairy Princess, educating students about the importance of the dairy industry and has volunteered her time at the Wisconsin State Fair Moo Booth and at a local food cooperative. O'Brien graduated with honors from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in May 2008 with degrees in journalism and mass communications with an emphasis in broadcast journalism. She gained experience in journalism by participating in Panthervision, the Broadcast Club at UW-Milwaukee, and Student Commitment 2008. O'Brien works for WISN-TV/DT in Milwaukee as an assignment editor. She was also a finalist for the 61st Alice in Dairyland position.

**Rebecca Paris**, Belleville, will graduate from Northern Michigan University in May 2009 with a degree in business management. Paris was extremely active in 4-H while growing up as well as being active on her parents' farm. She gained experience on the farm with managed intensive grazing, grass-based cheese, and seasonal breeding. During junior and high school, Paris was selected as the Belleville Dairy Queen and the Green County Dairy Queen, allowing her to develop her public speaking skills while educating others about dairy. At Northern Michigan University, Paris is active in Phi Sigma Sigma and the Student Leader Fellowship Program. During summers, she is active in promoting her parents' co-owned cooperative, Edelweiss Creamery, of Monticello.

**Melanie Welles**, Ixonia, became interested at a young age in horticulture, her current profession. Welles is the fifth generation to be raised on her family's homestead farm. She was very active in the Lebanon Luckies 4-H Club and Watertown FFA Chapter, holding leadership positions and winning many awards for growing and exhibiting flowers. Welles represented Wisconsin in the 1997 National Junior Horticulture Association Contest, State FFA Band, and National FFA Band. Melanie attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she participated in Horticulture Society, Floral Evaluation Team, Spanish Club, the Association of Women in Agriculture, and Brass Ensemble. She graduated from college in May 2003 with a bachelor of science degree in horticulture and a minor in Spanish. Welles gained interview and public speaking experience serving as the 2000 Dodge County Fairest of the Fair. Welles is completing her thesis to earn a master of science in floriculture from Colorado State University. Welles is employed at Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia and has gained previous experience at Timbuk II Plant Co., Ohio, and Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprises, Colorado.

The public can attend a question-and-answer session Thursday, May 14, during which the finalists answer impromptu questions posed by the current Alice and typical of those that she receives, and the Alice in Dairyland Finale on Friday evening, May 15. There will be a banquet at Burlington High School Friday evening at 5:45, followed by the finale program starting at 7:30 p.m. The finale program will also be live on the web at [www.wisconsinagconnection.com](http://www.wisconsinagconnection.com).

Tickets for the Alice in Dairyland Finals events are available by calling 262-763-3676. They are also available in Burlington through the Community State Bank, First Banking Center, and the Fox River State Bank. Additional event information is available at [www.aliceindairyland.com](http://www.aliceindairyland.com).

Alice in Dairyland is a full-time public relations professional employed by the DATCP Division of Agricultural Development for a one-year term. Each year, Alice travels more than 40,000 miles throughout the state and nation, promoting Wisconsin products to audiences of all ages and types. She educates the media, youth and civic groups about the many facets of the state's agricultural industry.

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