



COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURAL & LIFE SCIENCES
University of Wisconsin-Madison



Sara Hanke
Herdperson
Fischer Valley Dairy; Plymouth, Wisc.
Certificate-Dairy Herd Management
Farm & Industry Short Course

“Stay educated and don’t be afraid of modern advances and change. Embrace what will work for you and don’t dismiss a new idea because you are unwilling to try it.”

- Sara Hanke

She spends her time building the family farm

Sara Hanke’s experiences while growing up helped define her career goals at a young age. Her parents’ farm in Plymouth, Wisconsin exposed her to both agriculture and small business ownership, which ignited Sara’s ambition to continue farming in her family’s tradition.

“I liked the idea of being my own boss and owning my own business,” Sara explains. “I decided that farming with my parents would allow me to fulfill my goals.”

The UW-Madison’s Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) provided Sara with training that complimented both her past experiences and future aspirations. “I never envisioned myself doing a job that didn’t work with animals,” says Sara. After she completed the FISC program with a certificate in Dairy Herd Management, Sara became the Herdperson at Fischer Valley Dairy, her family’s farm in Plymouth.

The FISC coursework expanded Sara’s knowledge in many areas that she uses daily, such as reproduction and palpation. “Cows are my main responsibility,” she says of her role on the farm. “I care about the animals and their well-being.” Her tasks are varied, ranging from milking the farm’s 130 dairy cows to managing the farm’s breeding program. She also maintains all animal health records.

While on campus, Sara participated in the Dairy Judging Team. In addition to complimenting the knowledge she was learning in class, this extracurricular activity also provided an opportunity for her to build interpersonal skills. Today, Sara values her ability to communicate clearly and work as part of a team. “I work well with other people, whether they are my own family members, the vet, or the nutritionist. We work together to ensure the health and well-being of the farm.”

Sara acknowledges that her career choice is challenging at times. “Farming is hard work,” she says. “It not only takes knowledge of cattle and land, but also knowledge of sound business practices.”

As for the future of farming, Sara hopes that small farms will be able to secure adequate profits to remain independent. “I try to stay educated on the latest technology and practices,” says Sara, a strategy that she hopes will help Fischer Valley Dairy remain successful in the future.

There is also a real need to address the changing rural landscape and population, Sara advises. “As this country grows, you will have to learn to work with neighbors who may not understand what it takes to run a farm.”

Overall, Sara’s success is rooted in her dream to someday own her own farm. Thanks in part to the skills and experiences that FISC provided her, Sara is transforming her dream into a reality that gets bigger and brighter each day.