

The Power of Youth

Sometimes, Wisconsin's dairy industry comes out the true winner. Today, as a result of a 16-year old who wasn't afraid to take a risk and speak out, there are a few more Wisconsinites who may see the dairy industry in a new light. Read on and find out about a young man who found an unusual opportunity to enlighten a non-suspecting audience.

Colter Sikora of Cornell, a sophomore at Cadott High School, recently found a unique opportunity to spread the word about Wisconsin's dairy industry. Motivated by a \$50 first place prize, Colter entered his school-sponsored Earth Day Speaking Contest.

Topics ranged from over-population and deforestation to global warming. But agricultural preservation caught his attention most.

"Agricultural Preservation – Right Here at Home" was the title Colter selected for his speech. In it, he discussed how privileged we are.

"In America we are fortunate," he said. "We have both a safe and inexpensive food supply. People in other countries spend 50, 60, or 80 percent of their income on food. In America, we spend 10."

Keeping in mind the contest had an Earth Day theme, Colter explained how the economy and the environment can benefit from agriculture.

"Recently, because of the workings of a panel of citizens that included farmers, environmentalists, conservationists, and local government, Gov. Jim Doyle signed into law AB 868, more commonly known as siting legislation," Colter said. "Under this new law, a set of common sense, environmentally sound guidelines will be formulated for farms that wish to grow and modernize. This is a true win-win for the state of Wisconsin. Protecting our environment and seeing our dairy industry grow, instead of decline, are two very real potential outcomes of this important legislation.

"Our farmers must be allowed to stay in business. And to stay in business, they must make a profit. Dairy farmers are finding ways to do this, some by expanding. As in the case of the newly passed siting legislation, we must continue to find ways to produce food in an economic and environmentally sound way."

Colter said he knew he was taking a risk with his unconventional Earth Day speech and wasn't surprised when judges said it was too business-oriented and that agricultural preservation means "preserving our topsoil." Still, Colter received second place and was the contest's youngest participant.

But from a dairy industry standpoint, it's important that Colter believed in the dairy industry and understood how agricultural preservation also means "preserving the dairy industry."

If the school's 350-member student body and faculty had been allowed to judge, Colter's speech would have been the winner. Upon completion of his speech, the packed auditorium roared with applause and Colter received a standing ovation from the presidents of the school's FFA chapter and Student Council. And, students and teachers congratulated him throughout the remainder of the day.

(article pull-quote) Wisconsin's dairy industry comes out the true winner here. Today as a result of a 16-year old who wasn't afraid to take a risk and speak out, there are a few more Wisconsinites who may see the dairy industry in a different light. Colter found an unusual opportunity to enlighten and educate a non-suspecting audience. (scott's version): Sometimes, Wisconsin's dairy industry comes out the true winner. Today, as a result of a 16-year old who wasn't afraid to take a risk and speak out, there are a few more Wisconsinites who may see the dairy industry in a new light. Read on and find out about a young man who found an unusual opportunity to enlighten a non-suspecting audience.

Incidentally, Colter still ended up being a winner. His mom, Dairy Business Association member Darla Sikora of Citizens State Bank of Loyal, struck a bargain with Colter: He handed her the second place prize of a pizza gift certificate and she forked over \$50!