

4th Annual West Coast Robotics Dairywomen's Summit

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On Wednesday, March 12, over 160 women gathered in Abbotsford for the 4th annual Dairywomen's Summit. West Coast Robotics hosted the event to bring women from across the country together to connect, learn, and share stories of inspiration. The evening consisted of an elite-level dinner followed by three engaging speakers.

1. Sydney Moore

Sydney Moore, a PhD candidate and sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia, had a passion for animals at a young age despite growing up in the suburbs of Toronto. She aspired to become a veterinarian, so she attended the University of Guelph to pursue an Animal Biology degree. Throughout her undergraduate degree, she gained diverse animal experience by working at small animal clinics, the Toronto Zoo, and hog barns! Sydney's experience with pigs, conducting an undergraduate thesis project on boars, was the beginning of her agricultural research journey.

Her time in the pig barns wasn't always positive though. Sydney shared that working with boars was not easy, and men at the barns would make statements like, "This is why women shouldn't work in agriculture." However, Sydney didn't let this deter her from pursuing an agricultural career. Instead, she used this to channel her ambition and show that she belonged in the industry.

Throughout this project, Sydney discovered her love for research, but not so much for pigs. However, her experience opened doors to another undergraduate research project, this time with Dr. Trevor DeVries to study feeding behaviour in ketotic cows. Her new love for cows led her to continue working with Dr. DeVries to pursue a Master's in Animal Nutrition, studying lactating cow behaviour, production, and health.

During her graduate studies, Sydney attended conferences, mentored students, and discovered her passion for teaching. Her networking skills led her to connect with UBC professor Dr. Ronaldo Cerri who offered her a PhD position with the opportunity to create her own research project. Sydney stated that it would have been easy to continue her studies at Guelph but noted that **"sometimes the hardest decisions are the best for**

you." Sydney is nearing the end of her PhD at UBC, studying the impact of automated sensory technologies on improving herd health detection. She aspires to eventually pursue a career in academia to continue sharing her passion and knowledge of the dairy industry.



(L-R) Morgan Sangster, Sydney Moore and Rebecca Senicar were the featured speakers at the 4th annual WCR Dairywomen's Summit.

2. Morgan Sangster

Morgan Sangster is no stranger to the dairy industry. Currently serving as BC Dairy's Producer Support Manager, she has worn many other hats both in and outside of the dairy industry.

Growing up on a hobby farm in Manitoba, Morgan developed a love for animals at a young age and wanted to become a dairy farmer. However, since there were not many dairy farms local to her, she gained experience in other agricultural industries along the way. This included working with hogs and beef feedlots. Morgan attended Brandon University with aspirations of becoming a veterinarian but decided that this academic path was not the right fit.

Morgan reiterated during her talk how she **"loves to challenge herself and try new things"** which led her to move out west to Alberta. She worked on a large commercial dairy before deciding to return to school, this time for something completely different: esthetics. During her program, Morgan recalls continuing to milk cows before and after class, often receiving comments about the facial steaming room smelling very "organic" while she was present. For a school project, Morgan brought her classmates to the farm to compare esthetics to dairy farming (comparisons included hoof

trimming vs pedicures, singeing udders vs waxing, and branding vs tattoos). Esthetics wasn't the only health and beauty degree that she earned though, a decade later Morgan also became a licensed massage therapist.

Ultimately, Morgan's passion for dairy became abundantly clear. She enjoyed working with animals more than dealing with people, so she shifted her focus back to the dairy industry. Morgan gained vast experience working at a variety of farms including commercial herds, a master breeder herd, research institution (USASK) and was Dairy Unit Coordinator at Lakeland College. Despite not having all the credentials required when she applied to various positions, she went for them anyway. **"If you don't ask, the answer is always no,"** was her advice. She encouraged others to take on challenges and step outside of their comfort zone.

Morgan also worked with Holstein Canada as a Western Canadian Field representative/Cattle Assessor. It was in this position where she was challenged to develop new skills to do the job effectively, and relate to the farmers, not just the cows. She noted that **having knowledge, experience and confidence is key for women to gain respect in the industry.**

Morgan is an example of how you don't need a dairy or agricultural degree to find your place in the industry. Hard work, experience, knowledge and confidence are some key qualities that can lead to multiple opportunities in the dairy sector.



3. Rebecca Senicar

Rebecca Senicar is a third generation dairy farmer and passionate member of numerous agricultural boards. Growing up on her family's dairy farm, Rebecca always felt most at home in the barn. With brothers, she felt like she constantly had to prove herself worthy and helpful on the farm.

Rebecca attended the University of Saskatchewan to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Animal Science. Learning more about the industry and connecting with like-minded classmates solidified her decision to return to her family's farm and manage the herd after school.

However, Rebecca was also a single mom at the time and that brought its own challenges and speaks of her resilient and determined character. She noted that she wanted to show her daughter that women can do anything that men can, even though at times, **"it is literally impossible to be a woman"** - Barbie. Rebecca shared some of her experiences of not being taken seriously because of things she couldn't control. Yet she used this as fuel to continue pursuing her passions in this sector.

Rebecca's desire to promote the dairy industry and educate others led her to serve on boards of agricultural organizations (sometimes as the first, and only, woman). These included the BC Young Farmers, BC Agricultural Council, and the Mainland Milk Producers Association. She shared that she was "stronger than she thought" and noted her desire to "contribute to something larger than herself."

Thank you to West Coast Robotics for organizing such a successful and memorable event for women who continue to contribute to our robust dairy industry. Future West Coast Robotics events can be found here: <https://www.westcoastrobotics.ca/events>.

Taking steps today for their tomorrow

Plan for growth, even if growth isn't the plan.

Planning ahead ensures you're ready for unexpected opportunities. While reacting to market growth is sometimes necessary, taking a strategic approach today can help you prepare for what's next.

West Coast Robotics offers a wide range of products and services to help you prepare for what's next, from barn design to long-term farm planning. Our goal is to support BC's dairy farmers as a trusted partner in growth.

Let us know how we can help inform your next steps.

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