

Cows reflect diversity of ILT Youthmark awards

In 24 years involved with the ILT Youthmark Young Achievers Awards, photographer Shelley Clark has never had cows in the mix before.

Wyndham's Kate Cummings is one of 49 successful recipients in 2016, earning the award for Holstein Friesian Cattle and Sheep Meat Judging.

Clark said it was a far cry from the traditional sporting and academic recipients and reflected the diversity of the province's youth.

"It's always nice to see students acknowledged for their achievements outside of what's considered the norm," she said.

"It's so important for our young people to get the kudos they deserve - too often society focuses on the negative of our youth."

The annual awards will be presented to students from all Southland secondary schools, as well as Blue Mountain College and Wakatipu High School, following an exhibition at the Ascot Park Hotel on October 27.

"Southland, with the backing of the ILT, is the only province in New Zealand that showcases its students like this. The awards all hang with such pride at the respective schools. It's such an honour and just the start of many for a lot of these students."

Cummings, of St Peters College in Gore, first embarked on her bovine endeavours as a three-year-old competing at local agricultural shows.

"I've never lost that passion for it - it just continues to grow. It's a family hobby that's been passed down," she said.

"The Holstein are such powerful animals compared to others. They're really intelligent and have their own characteristics.

"When I talk about cows, I could talk about them for hours."

Now 18, Cummings took out a national title for judging earlier this year despite being the youngest in the class and competing against adults nearly twice her age. The victory earned her the opportunity to represent New Zealand at the prestigious Sydney Easter Show in April next year.

"It will be incredible to go over there and experience it," she said.

Judging competitions were a great challenge with competitors given just 15 minutes to critique cattle before going in front of a panel of judges themselves to place the animals and justifying their decisions. Points were awarded across several criteria, including speaking

ability, dress code, etiquette and reasoning.

Cummings will study a Bachelor of Agriculture at Lincoln University next year and aims to expand her own dairy stud, named Maylea Holstein, in the future.

"The dairy industry is the backbone of New Zealand's economy and I'm passionate about its future. I love the breeding and nutrition side of dairying. There's always something to improve on ... breeding can be a very long process but it's definitely rewarding in the end," she said.

With the show season about to start, Cummings was in the process of preparing animals for competition, including breaking in calves and yearlings.

"Months before an animal even enters the show ring there's a whole lot of work that goes on behind the scenes. It's about creating trust with the animal. You have to have a special bond with them and that doesn't happen overnight," she said.

She was excited to receive the Youthmark Award.

"It's great to get a bit of recognition and show that it is a competitive sport just like the more traditional ones like netball and rugby," she said.



Caption: St Peter's College Year 13 student Kate Cummings with some of her prized Holstein Frisian cattle and many award ribbons. Photo: Shelley Clark