USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

South Central Soil Survey Region

Nacogdoches, Texas, and Ruston, Louisiana, Soil Survey Offices

NRCS Partners with Local Community College to Host Area Soils and Homesite Judging Contests

Purpose

NRCS employees from the Mt. Pleasant, Texas, field office and the Nacogdoches, Texas, soil survey office collaborated with the NRCS Texas State Soil Health Specialist and Northeast Texas Community College (NTCC) to host soils and homesite evaluation judging contests for high school Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters in the area. The contest determined which students would advance to the state competitions held each year at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas.

Background

Each spring NTCC hosts challenging area contests for FFA students seeking to advance to the state level in soils judging and homesite evaluation judging. Both contests increase students' awareness and understanding of environmental conservation, leading many to choose careers in the fields of soil science, biology, agriculture, forestry, wildlife, and range ecologies. NTCC's Agricultural Department, located on approximately 220 acres, partnered with the NRCS to set up the April 4, 2024, Area FFA Soil and Homesite Evaluation contests (figs. 1 and 2).

Figure 1.—Soils judging and homesite evaluation pit.

Figure 2.—Laser level used for assessing slope for the contest.

Key Outcomes

Even though they share similarities, homesite evaluation and soils judging focus on two separate aspects of land use. The homesite evaluation prepares students with knowledge of practical application of soil properties to evaluate specific sites for future residential or commercial development. Students must be aware of how various factors determine if a location contains conditions, including soil texture, water table depth, bedrock presence, and slope, which are conducive to building.

Soils judging teaches students to focus more on the agricultural aspects of each site and its suitability for crop production or range use. Students must account for soil texture and site slope, as with homesite evaluation, but they also assess nutrient deficiencies and mechanical practices that should be implemented.