

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Soil and Plant Sciences Division

Southern Great Plains Region 9



MLRA Soil Survey Office: 9-STW

Region 9 Supports 68th Annual National Land and Range Judging Contest

The 68th annual National Land and Range Judging contest brought just under 700 4-H and FFA members, from 34 states, to compete. The official contest was held on May 2, 2019 on land owned by the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe at Concho north of El Reno, Oklahoma in Canadian County. Participants had two very rainy days of practice at very muddy sites at Lake Arcadia in Oklahoma City. The weather and ground conditions didn't slow the kids down one bit, and by contest day the rain finally stopped, and the sun came out!

Soil scientists from Region 9 and NRCS Texas assisted the Oklahoma staff in preparation for the contest. They also provided on-site technical assistance and officiated during the final contest. On Monday, practice sites were set up for Land, Range, and Homesite judges and coaches to view and assess the Oklahoma soils. Time was also allotted for the practice pits to be scored.

Tuesday and Wednesday were the practice days where soil scientists and range management specialists assisted the students and coaches as they familiarized themselves with the Oklahoma soils and rangelands at the two practice sites. On Tuesday morning, the coaches were given the answers to the practice pits, enabling them to compare and score the results the students provided during practice. On Wednesday, as the students continued the practice session, a small group of soil scientists led by Steve Alspach, Oklahoma State soil scientist, set up the official contest site that included 16 pits—four sites with four pits at each site.

On Thursday morning, the students were split into groups and the official contest began. The contest was comprised of three events: Land Judging, Range Judging, and Homesite Evaluation. Land judging contestants entered several 1- to 4-foot deep pits to evaluate the qualities of the soil and determine its potential for agricultural production. Range judging contestants visited several rangeland sites to identify plant species and determine the site's value for cattle production and quail habitat. The homesite evaluation event challenged contestants to determine the value of a site for residential development.

The awards ceremony was held Thursday evening at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum to honor both team and individual winners in each of the three categories.

The national team championship trophies for Land Judging were awarded to the Tyler FFA Chapter of West Virginia, and the North Miami Sr 4-H Club of North Miami, Indiana. National individual championship trophies for Land Judging were awarded to Madison Craven of the Tyler FFA Chapter of West Virginia, and Gavin Taylor of the Monroe County 4-H Club of West Virginia.



NRCS soil scientist Troy Collier, Jeremy Dennis, Jarred Goedeke, Carl Woods, and Chris Hobbs along with Kevin Mink, soil conservatist, discuss preparations of scoring the practice pit.





Contestants familiarizing themselves at the practice sites.



Foggy morning on Contest Day at the official pit site.



Contestants (future soil scientists) make soil determinations during the contest.



Contestants (future range management specialists) make range determinations at the official site.

The national team championship trophies for Range Judging were awarded to the Hamilton FFA Chapter of Hamilton, Texas, and the Wessington Springs 4-H Club of South Dakota. National individual championship trophies for Range Judging were awarded to Jessica Brown of the Hamilton FFA Chapter of Hamilton, Texas, and Noah Hainy of the Wessington Springs 4-H Club of South Dakota.

The national team championship trophies for Homesite Evaluation were awarded to the Hondo FFA of Hondo, Texas, and the Monroe County 4-H Club of West Virginia. National individual championship trophies for Homesite Evaluation were awarded to Preston Twilligear of the Hondo FFA Chapter of Hondo, Texas, and Madison Stroud of the McCook County 4-H Club of South Dakota.

Coaches, judges, and site preparation assistance were provided by Region 9 staff that included Altus, Oklahoma soil scientists Tyler Kempf and Tyson Morley; Stillwater, Oklahoma soil scientists Jeremy Dennis and Jarred Goedeke, and range management specialist, Colin Walden; Woodward, Oklahoma soil scientists Steve McGowen, Chris Hobbs, and Justin Morgan; Texas soil scientists Richard Gelnar; and Kansas soil scientist John Warner. NRCS Oklahoma State staff included Oklahoma State soil scientist Steve Alspach; and Oklahoma resource soil scientists Troy Collier, Clay Salisbury, Jake Boyett, and Carl Woods. Various other agencies and cooperators from Oklahoma participated as well.

Steve Alspach said it very well—“These contestants represent the next generation of farmers, ranchers, conservationists, and land managers. Events like this are as much an opportunity for us to introduce high school students to a potential career with USDA as it is a STEM learning experience for them.” (STEM is a curriculum focused on the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).