



**Natural Resources
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News Release

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National contest puts STEM skills to the test

OKLAHOMA CITY, April 26, 2016—Over 100 FFA and 4H teams from across the country will converge on Oklahoma City May 3-5 for the 65th Annual National Land and Range Judging Contest. Qualifying teams from 34 states will challenge their knowledge of soil and plant science, land management and natural resources conservation in the field. Oklahoma is expected to send 10 teams to the event.

Officiation and on-site technical assistance for all three days of the contest is provided by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma State University and The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation.

“These contestants represent the next generation of farmers, ranchers, conservationists and land managers,” said Steve Alspach, NRCS state soil scientist for Oklahoma. “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.

The contest is comprised of three events: land, range and home site evaluation. Land judging contestants will enter several three to five foot deep pits to evaluate the qualities of the soil and determine its potential for agricultural production. Range judging contestants will visit several rangeland sites to identify plant species and determine the site's value for cattle production and quail habitat. The home site evaluation event challenges contestants to determine the value of a site for residential development.

During the first two days of the event, teams will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Oklahoma's soils and rangeland at two practice sites. The official contest on the third day takes place at a secret location that is revealed the morning of the contest. This ensures all teams are experiencing the official site for the first time.

Contest winners will be announced the evening of May 5 during a banquet at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

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Contest sponsors are Oklahoma AgCredit, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, American Farmers & Ranchers, National Conservation Foundation, The Sirloin Club of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Auxiliary, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Wyndham Garden OKC Airport, Catering by Finley, Lee Roy and Sylvia Hudson, Parker Land and Cattle Company, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees, Soil and Water Conservation Society Oklahoma Chapter and Society for Range Management Oklahoma Section.

Supporting governments and agencies are NRCS, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, Oklahoma Department of Career & Technology Education, and Oklahoma State University.

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Note to media:

The best time to speak with teams and coaches in the field is on May 3-4 at the Arcadia Lake practice site. Contact Robert Hathorne to arrange a visit, 405-338-5207.

Event headquarters is located at Wyndham Garden Oklahoma City Airport hotel.