

National Land & Range Judging Contest

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

NEWS RELEASE

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Farmers Union, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, State Conservation Associations and Agriculture Groups across the nation.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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contact: Bobbie Steenbergen, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, 405/297-8938 or Mark Harrison, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 405/521-6787 or Don Bartolina, Oklahoma County Conservation District, 405/245-2324

2006 Land Judging Contest Winners Honored

First Place Results Noted

Oklahoma City — Over 150 teams of teenage FFA and 4-H members competed in the 55th annual National Land and Range Judging Contest, held May 2-4, according to contest cochairman Dan Lowrance, of Duncan, Okla. Lowrance is president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor. "We had teams from over 35 states competing this year," Lowrance said.

Lowrance notes the idea of a land judging contest was invented by three Oklahoma conservationists in 1942. They decided which soil qualities could be judged and developed score cards to test skills. The idea caught on and Oklahoma City has been hosting the national contest since 1952.

The 4-H and FFA participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. Lowrance said the teams match skills in judging the adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and homesite construction. An adult category is provided to allow coaches, team alternates and others interested in soil to compete.

"The contestants take turns examining the soil in pits and trenches dug especially for the contest," Lowrance said. He noted that the skills the teens test at the contest involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resource conservation, home building and construction.

The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location. They then travel to the site, with a police escort, in a caravan of over 100 cars spanning several miles. This year the Art Eckroat Farms hosted the Land Judging Contest and the Ray Springer Ranch at M-D Park hosted the Range Judging Contest. The contest day was held May 4.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum when the day's freshly-tabulated results were announced. National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA, 4-H and adult divisions. Bruce Knight, national chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, attended the awards banquet. Knight was in Oklahoma for a speaking engagement at the Wagoner County Conservation District Soil & Water Stewardship Week breakfast on Friday morning.

In Land Judging, FFA competition, the Hot Springs FFA Chapter of Truth or Consequences, N.M., won in the team category and the first place individual winner was Samantha Day of that team. In the 4-H competition the Jasper County 4-H Chapter, Rensselaer Ind., was the winning team, and Randy Lehman of that team was the individual winner. The adult category winner was Shawn Dygert of Kuna, Idaho.

In the Range Judging Contest, the Roland, Okla., FFA chapter won the FFA team competition, and Sarah Lockwood of that team took the first place individual FFA award. The Butte Chapter of Newell, S.D., won the 4-H team category, and Dustin Hawkins of that team placed first in the individual category. Mike Kirpatrick of Fox, Okla., won in the adult category.

In Homesite Evaluation, the Bradenton, Fla., chapter won the FFA team competition, and Carson Nail from Guthrie, Okla., took the first place individual FFA award. The Barbour County, W.V., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Alicia Bosely of that team placed first in the individual category. Shawn Dygert of Kuna, Idaho, won the adult award in the Homesite competition as well as in the Land Judging category.

Each year, an individual is selected as official Contest Honoree in recognition of outstanding support or contribution to the event. This year the 2006 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award was presented to Frank E. Evans of Stillwater, Okla. President of the Oklahoma Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and retired employee of Farmers Home Administration, Evans has recruited and coordinated group leaders for the Land & Range Judging Contest for the past 36 years. He served as a group leader himself for several years previous to that. Evans and his wife Jewell have been married for 56 years and have two grown sons.

Robert Dukes, a soil conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, stationed in Oklahoma City, was honored for "behind the scenes" work on the contest. For years Dukes has prepared the sites for the contest and then ensured that all holes were filled and litter removed to return the sites to their pre-contest state.

Lowrance credits the OACD Auxiliary, conservation district employees association and Oklahoma conservation districts for helping make the contest a success.

"I would like to thank all the conservation districts, businesses and associations who sponsored this educational contest," Lowrance said. "It takes a tremendous amount of time, effort and money to put on an annual event like this."

"A special thanks goes to the Art Eckroat Farms and Ray Springer Ranch at M-D Park for hosting the contest sites." Lowrance said, "Thanks also to the Noble Foundation for sponsoring the printed program and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for hosting the awards banquet, along with many other sponsors."

Lowrance said the Auxiliary of the National Association of Conservation Districts sponsored the Social Hour and Dance this year, hosted by the OACD Auxiliary. Members of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Employees assist with the very vital contest tabulating, which takes place in the few hours between the end of the contest and the beginning of the awards banquet.

In addition to the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, contest cosponsors include the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, Oklahoma Farmers Union, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and numerous other businesses and organizations.

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